

God is Not a Slot Machine

PREFACE to the First Edition

This book is dedicated to all those who leave the salvation of mankind where it belongs in the hands of God. Because they trust God to love humanity enough to save it, they are liberated to the opportunity of loving their neighbor in sincerity and tolerance. These are the practitioners of unconditional love who today look to the future wholeness of mankind in God. They look beyond the now rampant divisions of a proud species bound by false knowledge.

To you and those who aspire to be like you, this book is dedicated. If you respect the Bible enough to change your own ideas to conform to God's will revealed in it, you are about to start a profitable journey. If you have rarely or never read the Bible, I hope that this book will open your eyes to respect it more when you have finished it.

To those who doubt or worse, I think your doubt or poor opinion of the Bible is most likely due to the ignorance, abuses and errors of those who sincerely or hypocritically claim to teach it. These self-proclaimed representatives of God put their own words into the mouth of God and so distort what the Bible actually says. To be fair, I must admit that the Bible is difficult to understand and that most who have followed it are sincere.

I wish to stress that I do not think that this is the last word on the subjects covered. I do practice what I understand, and I feel that I must share what I understand. For that which is true, I thank God who revealed it to me. For that which time may prove to be less, perhaps much less than perfect, I must take sole responsibility. I have waited years to begin to write because I am somewhat aware of the responsibility of any-one who presupposes to teach God's Word. I respect the courage of anyone who so knowingly puts his life on the line in God's service.

There are many teachers to thank. Too many to list, in fact. But, yes, I must in all fairness list one. Without her help I doubt that this book would have been written, or if it was written, that you would have the patience to read it. I had an English teacher in the seventh grade, 1963, in Nashua, NH. Her name was Miss Wolfe. I don't know where she is, but she had the patience to teach me what grammar I have learned. So, Miss Wolfe, wherever you are, this one's for you, too.

Thank-you,
Christopher J. Patton
March 6, 1989

INTRODUCTION

God is not a slot machine.

Listening to many preachers, you'd think He was. "Just send me your ten or your hundred dollars, and God will open His storehouse of all the World's wealth and bless you," they proclaim. Some will even bellow, "He'll bless you ten, an hundred, or a thousand fold!"

This presentation of tithing implies that if you put your money in the preacher's pocket, it might payoff. It's more sure than the lottery. It's for a good cause, for the Lord's Work. And, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

Even with altruistic intentions, this kind of charitable giving is conditional love. It is giving to get. It is not worship to the God of Israel revealed by Jesus. It is slavery to the god of mammon, the god of this world, the buck "that makes the world go 'round." It is an act of fear for physical survival and not one of faith in the Creator and His Son who knows all our needs - both material and spiritual - before we ask and is indeed amply able to supply them all.

It's an easy trap to fall into. Many sincere people do. The worst cases are those who may have experienced some kind of monetary blessing shortly after giving to one ministry or another. It may have been chance, or it may be that God did bless that person for giving.

Years ago, when I first began to give to religious organizations, I experienced such a pay-off, but I do think that I gave without any awareness that I was hoping for a financial blessing in return. Nonetheless, it is an absolute fact that the stories of rich pay-off were in my head, lodged in my subconscious.

Once I started to tithe - once I was hooked, I became afraid of what would happen to me if I were to stop. What curses would God rain down upon such a grasping, selfish, materialistic, money-grubbing excuse of a Christian who would stop playing the religious lottery? My brain could have done overtime if I had allowed guilt a free rein with my knowledge of Biblical vengeance. This fear was reinforced by the religious organization that I was supporting.

Obviously, I am not saying that God doesn't exist, or that He does not bless people materially. He does. But God does not payout indiscriminately like a slot machine. Only chance does. God has the "Big Picture" in mind for your life which includes how a material blessing might affect your spiritual life, and how you might use it.

I hope that you get the point of our naturally human vulnerability in this area of God and money. That is

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why Jesus made His famous statements about "God and mammon" in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew chapters 5-7)

These latent attitudes are exacerbated by our modern western social values. We live in societies driven by complex, sophisticated economies based on competitive trade and monetary exchange. Financial survival seems to be a constant struggle between inflation and high interest rates, the need to produce and the need to preserve the environment. If we aren't openly aware of them, these attitudes of mammon will unconsciously control our lives. That's part of what "serving mammon" means. Deceptively, this enslavement can come in the guise of serving God.

Often the same ministers who proclaim the grace of Jesus also teach that Christians must obey the Law that was "done away" when it comes to tithing. In their opinion Christians sin if they do not tithe a full ten per cent to some valid religious organization.

The idea is that they, the preachers of the gospel, have replaced the Levitical priesthood of old. The "gospel Truth" of the New Covenant of grace is conveniently forgotten when it comes to the ministerial pocketbook.

Quoting Malachi 3:8, often out of context, many will go so far as to accuse their listeners of "stealing from God" unless they pay their tithes first - even before their taxes, if possible. "But if you do, then God will open the windows of heaven and rain a blessing upon you that will fill your house to overflowing."

This blessing is often subtly or blatantly represented as being material. If you the listener have tested a particular ministry by sending it your tithes and offerings but still failed to receive a payoff, then, "You, dear listener, are in a trial of faith!" Naturally, this type of trial can only be overcome by still more giving to this same ministry.

In effect what is happening from a secular perspective is that both preacher and supporting co-worker are playing a psychological dependency game in God's name. The preacher is counting on the fact that if enough people take the chance of sending him money, some of them will get a "blessing" and those who do will consider their "blessing" to be God's response to their donation to his church or television show. Logicians term this generalization from an unusual or atypical case the Fallacy of Converse Accident.

This book is not purposefully directed toward any individual or toward any currently popularized financial abuse by those who receive tithes and offerings in the name of God. Anyone claiming to be a teacher or preacher of God, who has caused others to stumble as a result of his own defamation of

God's name through his sins, has brought judgment upon himself.

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing: but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many a pang. (I Timothy 6: 3-10)

I do not criticize the sincerity of the tither or giver. What is wrong is the method of approach, the manner of teaching utilized by some who claim to preach the Gospel. Of course, many - probably most - people who give to religious ministries do so out of sincere motive. These people tithe as an act of worship and honor of God.

Their methods may be successful in extracting cash to fuel their evangelistic efforts, but that success is not proof that their methods create a balanced attitude of faith in the hearts of the givers. The state of your heart or spirit is God's primary concern, not the size and number of checks you write in support of men who may honestly consider themselves to be His servants.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly: and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." (II Corinthians 9:6-8)

God has promised to bless if the attitude of the giver is right. It is the responsibility of the preacher to teach in such a manner that these right spiritual attitudes are encouraged and inspired.

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But God wants His ministers to teach the truth about what He really says. Too many preach what they think. He says and so mislead their audiences by distorting God's Word. It is conveniently beneficial to ministerial monetary increase if listeners somehow hear the "gospel of prosperity" in an evangelist's message, even if presented indirectly.

But conscious or unconscious distortion of the Biblical teaching is unnecessary. If a minister is faithful in his handling of the Word, then God has promised take care of him. The Bible is plain in stating that the Lord's ministers have a right to wages. However, if a preacher is not faithful in handling God's Word, or if his motives are wrong, then God will really take care of him. The Judge does not take kindly to the abuse of sincere peoples' generosity.

"Buyer Beware" is far more permissible in the business of trade than in the support of religious efforts. Open disclosure of economic records is critical. It is your obligation to know generally about how your donation to God is being used. How is money used in His work by those who receive your checks? This includes detailed expenditure records including ministerial compensation and hidden perks of benefits. It requires a little effort for those making donations to check up on how their money is being used, but it is the right thing to do. **Too many have taken the lazy way out of the dilemma by simply refusing to give any more.**

How Christians are taught about giving is important because there are some people who give out of psychological compulsion. It may be out of fear, or out of a hope that they will be blessed with an easier life now and/or a reward in a life hereafter. Fear-driven donors are looking to the false god of Mammon, a better mortal life and not to God, the King of Eternity. Consequently, these people attribute emotional or psychospiritual rewards in this life to monetary support of their favorite preacher.

Psychology describes this human interaction between giver and receiver as a variant form of operant conditioning. For the preacher the reward is consistent. It pays every time. If he can harangue enough people long enough and dramatically enough, some will always send money. Someone will break down and help him save his TV show, or as in one case, the preacher contended that it was his life that was at stake. The technical term for this behavior is continuous reinforcement. For these preachers, God is like a candy machine.

In the case of those who give, the technical term refers to a partial reinforcement according to a variable-ratio or variable-interval schedule. Unlike the preacher, the giver is rewarded after an uncertain number of contributions or at uncertain intervals of time after contributing. The rewards are occasional and unpredictable in time and amount of

payout - just like a slot machine. It is addictive by the very nature of its uncertainty.

What DOES the Bible say about tithing? Is it commanded? If so, should we pay a full ten per cent? What does God really want from those who would seek to please Him? What should you and I give? The national average of one to three per cent?

With patience and an open mind, the biblical principles are not all that complicated. The key is to read each of the many sections of scripture that relate to money and God in their historic and cultural contexts.

Most misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches comes from reading it with a predetermined point of view or bias. Our biases usually come from our parents, our friends, or the social group in which we live. Try to set aside your own opinions long enough to read this short book through to its end. Then pray and think about what the Bible says to you. Afterwards decide how you are going to incorporate what you've learned into your daily practice. Think it out for yourself.

As you read my comments, it will help if you also read along in your own Bible. Many verses are quoted directly in the text because the object is to clarify Biblical verses and principles. Don't rush it. You may have to re-read some sections because this is a journey into other times and places - cultures and peoples very different from our twentieth century western civilization.

Any difficulty you may have in understanding about giving will ultimately get down to the kind of relationship you have with God. This is the part of the answer only you can provide. It is not possible to discuss people and money without getting into other basic issues. But learning what the Bible has to say about these subjects will help.

The objective of this effort is your personal growth towards a better life through a fuller understanding of God. I hope it is achieved. May God bless the time and effort you put into it. I hope you will share your growth with others.

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Chapter 1 - EARLY REFERENCES TO TITHING

Supporters of Christian tithing often refer to sacrificial offerings in the stories of the Biblical Patriarchs as proof that tithing is a law of God predating the Law of Moses and the Levitical Priesthood. The idea is that tithing is an eternal and universal religious law that is not tied to the people and land of Israel.

This approach is necessary if the Christian ministry is to have claim on it today. Because the Old Testament explicitly commands tithing only on the produce of the Promised Land and directs its payment solely to the tribe of Levi, that claim will depend solely on New Testament support. But understanding the Old Testament provisions is essential context to any modern application of spiritual principles in the development of balanced teaching on giving to God.

Abraham's Example

Genesis 14 contains the first usually mentioned reference to tithing in the Bible. This chapter relates how four kings from the Euphrates conquered a number of cities in Syria-Palestine and took Lot, Abraham's nephew, captive. Abraham rescued Lot and took a good bit of booty. A tenth of that booty was given to Melchizedek, King of Salem, who was a priest of the Most High God. The rest of it was returned to the King of Sodom. Read the chapter.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine: now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand..."

And he gave him a tenth of all. (Genesis 14:18-20)

Abraham kept none of the recovered property so he had no increase. By its nature, recovered stolen goods would not be considered a wage or agricultural production. By and large the goods that Abraham seized were returned to the King of Sodom. There was a cost, though. Abraham's allies and servants had eaten a part of it during the campaign, and some of them also took shares, but not Abraham. (Genesis 14:23-24) In essence this "tithe" to Melchizedek and the reward to Abraham's allies were the King of Sodom's expenses for the recovery of his property.

Abraham had no increase to tithe upon. What he gave was an offering of thanks and appreciation to God on behalf of all of them, including the King of Sodom, in the amount of ten per cent of the booty.

Even if Abraham had kept it all, his donation would not be an applicable example of tithing because what was tithed on was the booty of war or the recovery of someone else's stolen property, not the increase of his flocks, fruit trees, crops or wages.

A major source of misunderstanding about tithing comes from confusing tithes with offerings. The two are very different in spiritual purpose and practical function. The tithe was always ten per cent. An offering was often ten per cent but could be less or more. The tithe was commanded. Some offerings were commanded and some were voluntary. The tithe is most often confused with commanded offerings, specifically with the offering of first fruits.

The tithe was not a thank offering. It was an obligation to pay the non-priestly Levites ten per cent of the Israel's increase or production. A thank offering is given to God - to His priests. It is not obligatory, and the offeror determines how much he will give.

The argument that God blesses tithers in excess of what they give does not negate the fact that Abraham paid ten per cent on property that wasn't his. Remember, it did not cost Abraham anything to give a tenth to Melchizedek because he kept nothing won from the battles.

Contrast this event with David's reaction to Araunah's offer to him of a threshing floor at no cost so that David could sanctify it as the site for the temple in Jerusalem. He refused because Araunah's proposal because it would cost him nothing. David felt unworthy and appreciative. He wanted some meaningful way to show some measure of how he valued God's love for him. Thus, he felt a debt of thanks to God for His Grace. (II Samuel 24:24)

The New Testament book of Hebrews, written after Levitical tithing had been in operation for centuries, refers in allegorical retrospect to Abraham's offering to Melchizedek as a tithe in chapter 7. The author of Hebrews calls this ten per cent offering a tithe and uses it as a symbolic demonstration for the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Levitical. Hebrews 7 is covered in detail later.

According to the rest of the Bible, the only way in which Abraham's offering to Melchizedek for his own and Lot's safe return resembled a tithe is that it was a tenth, which is the definition of a tithe. This specified amount is the only similarity between the clearly defined practice of tithing (as presented later in the context of the Levitical priesthood) and Abraham's gift.

To honestly determine if Abraham thought he was obeying an eternal or spiritual law of tithing, you must search the scriptures about Abraham. In examining what the Bible actually says instead of from a preconceived perspective, you will find no

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specific reference to tithing. There is a general reference in Genesis 26:5 to Abraham's fulfillment of "My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws," but nothing like, "And so Abraham tithed to the Lord of all his increase."

In Genesis 26 God repeats to Isaac His covenant promise, which he originally made with Abraham in chapters 12-22. This is that great Promise of Grace upon which the Christian hope is founded through the Messiah. As Paul clearly argues, in several of his letters, the Promise predates the Law of Moses.

The use of Mosaic terminology (commandment, statutes, laws, or ordinances) in describing Abraham's obedience is simply reflective of the fact that the book of Genesis was compiled in later times when the Mosaic Law was observed. It was the language used then to express Abraham's spirit of obedience of God's will.

But look through Genesis, and you will find God made few specific requests of Abraham. He was commanded to be circumcised and to father a son miraculously. Later he was told to sacrifice his only son of faith, Isaac, in a type of the Father's future sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus. Otherwise, Abraham was directed to,

Walk before Me, and be blameless (KJV, perfect).
(Genesis 17:1)

It is this latter command that Jesus repeats for us today in Matthew 5:48:

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

To think of Abraham walking around with a divinely inspired law book is ludicrous. Abraham walked and talked with God, sometimes face-to-face; furthermore, he was a man who, by strong social custom, was the absolute head of his household. Abraham was his own priest. He had no need for an institutionalized legal system like the very humanly imperfect families of Israel would need later.

God spoke directly to Abraham. Most of the evidence for laws not specifically stated in the patriarchal stories relate to the Western Semitic and Amoritic social customs of Abraham's culture thousands of years ago. They do not prove the existence of some mysterious, divine code of law that pre-dated the Ten Commandments.

Later, God did institute the concept of a mediator between Himself and His people. In the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible, the Torah), He established the Levitical priesthood as His mediators to the millions who made up the nation of Israel. Abraham needed no mediator.

Christian Application

To reach back into the Mosaic Law and pull the law of the Levitical tithe out of its naturally balanced and functional economic structure and apply it outside of its ancient context to Christians with the pronouncement of [You sin if you don't!] is to deny the gospel victory of grace over law. (See Galatians chapters 3 and 4 and Romans chapters 3 and 4).

Today it is not only the Jews who blaspheme God's name. No, the name of God is blasphemed by Christians who seek to advance their religious causes through political legalism. They try to change the laws of the land to solve human problems instead of relying on the unlimited power of God's grace. It is the extremist Christian who would impress his imperfect beliefs into political legislation rather than let God's love conquer all doubters.

Christians have yet to learn from the lessons of the nineteenth century when demonstrable scientific facts were rejected by religious leaders because of their association with an untried and unproven, but very threatening theory of evolution. This Christian fear of scientific truth defeated the faith of creation. As a result, the real story of God's creation remains buried almost out of reach of society. It has been obscured and ridiculed since it has been mostly left for unskilled believers and skilled unbelievers to promote Creationism in school texts.

Many so-called Christians use the works of their religion to promote Jesus instead of the sabbatical rest of grace in faith. In so doing they come under the New Testament condemnations reserved for those Jewish religious leaders who were faithless:

But if you bear the name Jew [Christian], and rely upon the Law [Bible], and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? [brackets added]

You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. (Romans 2:17-24)

Other than the story in Genesis 14, the Bible does not record any gifts or tithes paid by Abraham to Melchizedek or any other priest, but Abraham himself offered sacrifices to God. In fact the one Biblical custom Abraham practiced that can probably

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be traced back to the beginning is that of sacrificial offerings. As was the patriarchal custom, Abraham was his own priest: he was the head of the family. He both offered and consumed the offerings sacrificed in worship of God. Once, the LORD Himself was Abraham's guest. (Genesis 18)

Some have argued that Abraham's sacrifices were actually tithes since they erroneously think that tithes are the same as the offering of the first fruits.

The Levitical law of tithing was indeed derived from the concept of offering the first fruits of the ground and herds, but, as I will show in detail later, the tithe served a very different purpose than the first fruit offerings. In fact first fruit offerings continued even after tithing was practiced by Israel. They are not the same thing. Genesis 14 records Abraham's continuance of an ancient religious ritual in his sacrifices that was probably based on the concept of offering the first fruits, but it was not a legally defined tithe.

Cain and Abel

The first sacrifices recorded were offered by Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:3-5:

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. And Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

The hint from verse 7 is that somehow Cain had not done well. Commentators have speculated as to whether it was his attitude that was wrong, or that somehow the offering itself was faulty. There are a few ways the offering could have been faulty:

1. it was an offering of vegetables instead of blood;
2. or, the vegetables were the worst of Cain's harvest, so dishonoring God by not giving Him the best;
3. or, Cain simply did not offer enough.

Note that there is no explicit reference to tithing here. If these offerings were tithes, then either vegetable or animal offering would have been acceptable.

As we shall see later, the Levitical tithing laws did not specify that the Israelites had to give the Levites the best tenth or even the first tenth because the tithe represented a tenth of the Promised Land's agricultural production in all its variety of quality and quantity. It was never an offering of the first fruits. The Levites, however, were indeed required to give

the best tenth of the tithes they received as a special, obligatory offering to the Aaronites, who were the priests of God. If you do not know the difference between Levites and Aaronites, you are not alone. Just keep reading.

The Levitical laws direct the payment of an undefined tenth in the case of vegetable produce, and every tenth one counted in the case of flocks. Tithes never were firstlings. Firstlings and first fruits were always offerings, even after tithing was instituted for the Levitical priesthood.

It does not seem that Abel and Cain were tithing either; they offered their first fruits.

Offering the first fruits of agricultural production was probably the earliest form of gift. Abel offered the firstlings of his flock and not each tenth one. Consequently, the best explanation is that the offering of Abel was acceptable because it foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Messiah, as the first fruits of the human family of Adam, or the ground, which is the root meaning of "Adam."

If this is the case, then only a bloody animal sacrifice would have been acceptable to God because it looked forward to the blood of the Passover Lamb, Jesus, that covers sin. Cain, as the first born son, was the rightful heir to his father's priestly functions for the family, and he should have known that God wanted an animal sacrifice.

Thus, Abraham's ten per cent gift to Melchizedek is not a continuation of the practice of tithing from Abel because Abel did not tithe.

There is a big difference between one offering of ten percent to a priest or king and the continuous levy of a tithe of all produce as later established through Moses to support the Levites. The Mosaic ordinances provided for tithing ten per cent of every increase of the field and flock, each season, year after year. The practice of regularly paying tithes, as often taught from the pulpit, resembles the Mosaic provision for the Levitical Priesthood and not the practices of the patriarchs.

There is a critical difference between a voluntary decision to offer meaningful thanks and the obligatory payment of a legally enforceable tithe.

In the first case there is no sin if a material offering is not made: sin, if any, is found only in the possible lack of a thankful attitude. In the latter case, the payment of Levitical tithes on agricultural increase was required, and it also had to be a full ten per cent. Anything less than ten per cent was sin which incurred stipulated penalties. Even borrowing from tithes was discouraged by stiff repayment penalties.

If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. (Leviticus 27:31)

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Jacob's Example

The next reference of a patriarch offering ten percent to God is in Genesis 28:20-22. Here Jacob made a conditional vow concerning his safe return home to the land of Canaan. He made this vow as he was literally fleeing for his life from his brother Esau to his uncle Laban in Haran. This vow was made by Jacob on his own initiative in response to God's appearance in a dream. If God would bring him back to Canaan again safely, then he would offer God a tenth of all that he brought with him.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house: and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee."

Jacob made a personal, voluntary and conditional vow with God. He was not conforming to a commanded ordinance that applied impersonally to everyone under whatever conditions of life they might endure.

Jacob did not say, "God I know that You command tithing from all those who serve You, so I will serve You in that way, too." Neither did God ask Jacob to do this. He did not say to him, "Look here, I, the Almighty, am not going to bring you home safely unless you vow, right now, to pay me ten percent of everything I give you upon your return."

Jacob was aware of the covenant inheritance promises made to Abraham and to Isaac. He knew from his forebears who God was and that God was honored with an offering of first fruits. This is what Jacob offered to do - to continue what his fathers had done. If God was to be with him as He had been with them, then Jacob would give Him the offering of first fruits.

There is no clear statement as to whether Jacob tithed on a regular basis after his return. In this case it seems that Jacob paid a ten per cent customs tax when he re-entered Canaan. It was a thank offering to his God modeled on the social practices of his day. It was paid on all that he brought with him - on his cumulative compounded increase. That's hardly tithing as it is taught today. The implication is that Jacob chose to do this over and above his other offerings. God did bring Jacob home safely, but there is only quiet assumption that he paid his vow.

Jacob was his own priest. He took the pillow stone under his head and set it up as a single pillar of rock symbolizing the house of God. This stone was a type of the Messiah to come who would be the principal stone, the cornerstone or head of the corner for the future spiritual house of God, the Church.

Jesus is head of the Church just as he is head of the corner. Jacob was renamed Israel. (Genesis 32:28) He became Israel through overcoming, just as the Church overcomes with Jesus. So Jacob is a type of the Church who overcomes with the aid of her Head. The Church is the Israel of God, which is built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ in faith. (Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22; I Peter 2:4-10)

There was no temple or priesthood external to Jacob's family to receive tithes even if he paid them. He had the rights to the entire inheritance of the land of Canaan exclusively. (Read Genesis 28:10-19.) What God wanted was Jacob as His servant. This is what He got.

Clearly, the Biblical accounts do not support the belief that the righteous patriarchs regularly practiced tithing. The Biblical patriarchs did offer first fruits in accordance with ancient wisdom as later recorded in Proverbs 3:9:

Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce.

The evidence in Genesis must be interpreted from the perspective of the much later Levitical ordinances in order to see if there exists any support for Christians to tithe. If you wish to believe that tithing is an eternal law that originated prior to Moses and Mount Sinai, then you must overlook the above explanations and maintain that tithing was practiced by the patriarchs. I don't think that that is a defensible position so the safest, most conservative conclusion is to ignore the patriarchal references in attempting to determine if tithing is binding on Christians.

Chapter 2 - TITHING AND FIRST FRUITS

The routine practice first clearly appears with the founding of the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. The original King of Israel (YHVH or YHWH, the LORD in the English text) is spirit, a literal God-King. He did not directly receive, nor did He need to personally consume, any of the offerings or sacrifices burned on His altar.

The ancient Israelites were required to offer the first fruits and continual offerings for the atonement of sin. They were encouraged to offer sacrificial gifts of thanks and repentance. Both were teaching mechanisms for their own edification and eternal benefit. It was not for God's.

I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me. I shall take no young bull out of your house, nor male goats out of your folds.

For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all it contains.

Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of male goats?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High; and call upon me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and You will honor Me...

He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:8-15, 23)

The Levitical Priesthood

The Levitical Priesthood was established shortly after the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. It came about in conjunction with the constitution of the tribal kingdom of Israel out of a horde of ex-slaves from Egypt. The foundation of the tribes' legal relationship with each other is the covenant Torah with the Lord God given at Mount Sinai. The provisions for tithing were stipulated after God took one of the tribes, Levi, into His service, but the full application of the Torah's provisions did not take place until after the Israelites had settled in their new land.

During the Israelites' wandering in the desert, God miraculously and equally supplied everybody's food and water. There was no increase from the land, which was barren. At any rate, these people were on the move with no certain schedule. When God - as a pillar of fire or smoke - moved, they followed. He

didn't always give them much warning. There was no time to plant crops and wait for a harvest. It was a nation-army on an invasion campaign.

It is possible that the first born of the herds and cattle were offered in sacrifice along with other thank and sin offerings, but no tithes were taken from the herds or flocks. These offerings must have been infrequent or the people would not have complained about a lack of meat. God provided that need by sending quail. (Exodus 16:8-13)

During the wanderings in Sinai, there was no economical difference between the set apart or sanctified tribe of Levi and any other tribe. As far as living conditions or possessions were concerned, all of the tribes were equal. They were all dependent on God's miraculous provision of manna and quail rained from the heavens. Their drinking water supernaturally flowed from a detached boulder.

Once the tribes of Israel inherited the land, however, there would be a significant difference between the tribe of Levi and the rest of them. The Levites, including the priestly clan of Aaron, never received any provincial inheritances, only settlement villages (cities) scattered geographically throughout the land. From God's perspective the Levites were poor since all wealth ultimately derives from the combination of land and labor.

Instead of land, the Levites were granted by God the absolute rights to the tithe of the entire Promised Land's production. Their inheritance was the right to receive a variable ten per cent portion of the rest of the tribes' agricultural production. They did not receive a specific annual stipend. For example, the tithe was unlike the redemption of the first born (covered below) where the Israelite paid five shekels, once, at the birth of his first born son. He did not have to pay five shekels each year; nor did he sometimes pay one shekel or sometimes seven shekels. Tithing was the right to a specific percentage of the nation's annual increase. Each year's tithe yielded a variable amount of fruit, grain and edible or "clean" animals. (Deuteronomy 14:1-21)

Widows, Orphans and Aliens

The other effectively unlanded peoples: the widows, orphans and aliens, were considered poor for the same lack of land inheritance reason.

In the case of the widows and the orphans, they had limited or perhaps no ability to farm any land they might have a claim on. An alien didn't have any inherited claim to land unless they converted to the religion of Israel and were adopted into one of the family-tribe social units. Such adoption could come through a marriage contract, too.

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The lack of access to a landed inheritance is why these groups of people were provided for from tithe even though they had no natural rights to it. The assumption is that they all worshipped the God of Israel and sought His protection and provision. God promised Abraham that all his descendants would receive an inheritance in the Promised Land when He brought them out of slavery. Possessing the Promised Land was the central plank of their covenant or agreement. Provision for the alien was basic support hospitality until they became integrated into Israel's tribal social structure.

A parcel of land was of limited value if it could not be worked effectively. Widows and orphans were limited in the amount of work they could do. They did not choose to become widows or orphans. It was not their fault that their rightful inheritance could not properly support them as God intended. To support them out of the tithe was not stealing from the Levites since the widow and orphan had just as much right to an inheritance as they did.

The LORD legislated compassion and support for these temporarily "unlanded" or incompletely landed people. They were to share the benefits of the collective inheritance of the nation with the Levites until they were able to functionally benefit from their own inheritance. God had mercy on the alien in hope, perhaps, that the extension of this practical love would lead the stranger into the citizen fellowship of His nation Israel by being circumcised.

A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows.
(Psalm 68:5)

And you shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. (Exodus 22:21-24)

For widows and orphans, the use of their inheritances would pass to the nearest relatives who could work the land. They were expected to join the household of these next of kin, who would support them by working the widows' and/or orphans' parcels, if any, as well as their own hereditary fields. Once the orphan males were old enough, they would work their own fields and keep their own flocks and so return to economic independence.

Sometimes the widows were under legal obligation to marry their husband's brother so that the land would stay in the tribe and she could eat. (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) Orphaned daughters who could marry and produce children also had rights of economic independence through land. (Numbers 27:1-11)

The aliens were non-Israelite strangers in the land. They were aliens only so long as they did not accept the religion of Israel by being circumcised and eating

the Passover. Unless they lived in the few cities that existed at the time, the aliens next had to be integrated into the tribal structure through marriage or social adoption. The result of marriage or adoption would be the legal right to a piece of land, an inheritance.

These economic ordinances put everyone into a family-clan-tribe structure which provided for their economic and social support. They were the Old Testament legal expression of the New Testament admonition found in I Timothy 5:8:

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.

What were Tithes?

The tithes were paid from the production of the entire Promised Land of Canaan, renamed the Land of Israel. The Bible relates how, except for Levi, each tribe received a territory or province of its own. In exchange for receiving these inheritances, the eleven, non-priestly, tribes were to pay tithes on them to the relatively land-poor Levites. The Levites only had home garden plots in their villages and labor obligations on God's behalf; therefore, they had legal rights to ten per cent of the entire nation's production instead of what could be grown from a specified fair share of the land itself.

In order to pay a tithe, an Israelite had to have an inheritance. Only those tribes with landed inheritances could pay tithes. The unlanded poor were not required to pay tithes: they received temporary support from the tithe as an expression of God's mercy and care. As will be discussed in detail later, the ten per cent offering taken from the tithes received by the whole tribe of Levi were redistributed internally between the priestly sons of Aaron, who served at the altar due to their even greater time obligations on God's behalf for their nation.

Besides operating as a variable mechanism of economic compensation, the tithe doubled as the social safety net of ancient Israel. It provided a share in the produce from the Promised Land, God's guaranteed inheritance, for the needy. It was how God chose to fulfill His promises of support to the Levitical priests, the widow, the orphan, and the alien. It was a part of His program for a balanced distribution of wealth among those who had no inheritance within the agriculturally based socioeconomic system of ancient Israel.

The Levites never had a provincial inheritance; they had an eternal, binding legal right to the tithe instead. The widow, orphan, poor and alien would only temporarily be without the production of an inheritance. The provision

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from the tithe was to aid them until they could realize its benefits.

Sharing in the tithe was not the only provision of the Law for the unlanded. Another ordinance prohibited harvesting the "comers" of the field. This allowed travelers and the poor to harvest what they could eat as they passed by. (Deuteronomy 24:17-22)

Tithing was an act of active worship and one purpose for the tithe which is sometimes overlooked was to enhance the obedience to God's Law given through Moses. Israel was commanded to celebrate various annual feasts to the LORD. Festival celebration requires something to feast upon. That something came from the tithe. Israelites could consume produce from their tithes as long as they did so at the festival and not at home, or "within your gates."

Only on the third and sixth years of a seven year cycle did God command the full payment of all the tithe to the Levites, widows, orphans, and poor. The seventh year was a year of land sabbath or rest in which only that which "grows of itself" was available for harvest. This seventh year of rest applied to the cultivated ground but not to fruit trees or herds. Slightly different rules applied to tithing on these sources of "increase." (See Exodus 23:10-11 and Leviticus 25:17)

The tithes received by the Levites were in turn "tithed" upon. The Levites' "tithe of the tithe" was sent to the Aaronic priests at the Tabernacle or the Temple. A "tithe of the tithe" was in God's words, "an offering to the Lord" and not a tithe. God specified ten percent of the Levites' tithe received from all Israel as a means of identifying the first fruits since this "produce" was not actually harvested by the Levites. The first fruits are required offerings to God. **The Aaronic priests never received a tithe. They received only offerings, and only they received the offerings.**

You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread, nor is the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover to be left over until morning. You shall bring the very first of the first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. (Exodus 34:25-26).

In the Levites' offering, the Aaronite priests received the best tenth of the entire Promised Land's produce. Israel's other offerings or gifts such as the offering of the first fruits, provided the remainder of the priests' economic support.

Let's review the scriptures in context.

In the first five books of the Bible, referred to as the Torah or the Teaching Law of God, Moses recorded the original provisions for the support of the Levites and the priests, as well as for the disadvantaged.

Tithing was founded on God's promise of an inheritance to every son of Abraham.

First Fruits – First Born

Tithing is distinctly separate from God's right to Israel's first fruits and first born sons, but these sacrificial offerings are related to the establishment of the Levitical system.

The LORD's right to the first born sons was renewed, confirmed, and established forever when He delivered Israel from Egypt. At the time of the Exodus the LORD set aside for Himself all first born sons. The type is plain: God saves through the sacrifice of His first born, His only begotten Son, Jesus. This is important because God identifies Himself to Israel as her Deliverer, her Savior in the first of the Ten Commandments:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:2-3)

Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me, I, even I, am the LORD; there is no savior besides Me. (Isaiah 43:10-11).

There is no savior but God. He saves through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son who was, is, and will ever be One with Him. God's gift to the world was the sacrifice of his only begotten son. Salvation is defined in its fullness by the example of Jesus who is now eternally

...the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4)

Paul writes,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. (Romans 1: 16)

And Peter spoke, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

God delivered Israel from Egypt through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, which was a type of Christ, the Lamb of God (Revelation 5:6-14). It is through Jesus' sacrifice that God delivers us from the slavery of sin and death today.

Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

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Feasts, Tithes and Offerings

In the New Testament, God continues to link the celebration of His feast days with salvation. The festival worship of God is integrally entwined with questions on tithes and offerings. Tithes and offerings are two very autonomous aspects of worship which are often considered to be the same thing; however, they are different. They do not serve the same purpose.

Offerings supported the Aaronic priests; tithes supported non-priestly Levites and provided all Israel with an economic means to celebrate the feasts in a grand style.

Tithing is how God chose to distribute to the Levites their share of a national inheritance. It is integrally tied to the temple and its service for and by the physical nation of Israel. The temple was and is the symbol of Israel's independence as a nation under God. It represents Israel in possession of her earthly inheritance, the Promised Land, in accordance with her constitution, the Sinai Covenant.

The temple represented, and will represent at Jesus' return, the interim fulfillment in Israel of God's promise to all mankind. That promise is mankind's eternal possession of the earth as symbolized by New Jerusalem and the spiritual temple of God. (Matthew 5:5; Revelation 21:1-4, 10-24)

The national aspects of the Promise began with the deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh and Egypt:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me." (Exodus 13:1-2)

... you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD...and every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem. (Exodus 13:12-13)

And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, "What is this?" Then you shall say to him, "With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. And it came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every first-born in the land of Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every first born of my sons I redeem." (Exodus-13:14-15)

In Exodus 23: 14-19 God states:

Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as I, at the appointed time in the month of Abib, came

out of Egypt. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.

Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of First fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord God.

You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning. You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You are not to boil a kid in the milk of its mother.

The above instruction was repeated with a few additions in Exodus 34: 18-26. For example, verses 19-21:

The first offspring from every womb belongs to Me, and all your male livestock, the first offspring from cattle and sheep. And you shall redeem with a lamb the first offspring from a donkey; and if you do not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. You shall redeem the first born of your sons. And none shall appear before Me empty handed.

Leviticus chapter 23 lists the Feasts of God which focus on the various harvests in the ancient land of Israel. In particular verses 9-14 refer to "the sheaf of first fruits" which was a type of God the Father's acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice at His resurrection from the dead. (I Corinthians 15:20-24)

Chapter 3 - SUBSTITUTION OF GOD'S FIRST FRUIT

You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel. (Numbers 3:9)

Now, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every first-born, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine. For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt. I sanctified to Myself all the first-born in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine; I am the LORD. (12-13)

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Number every first-born male of the sons of Israel from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me, I am the LORD, instead of all the first-born among of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the first-born among the cattle of the sons of Israel." (40-41)

And for the ransom of the 273 of the first-born sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites, you shall take five shekels apiece, per head; you shall take them in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (The shekel is twenty gerahs), and give the money, the ransom money from those who were in excess among them, to Aaron and his sons. (46-48)

God selected Aaron and his sons to be His priests. He was their inheritance because the priests, particularly the High Priest, were like his mortal first born sons – the traditional patriarchal priests who served on earth as intermediaries for Him with humanity.

Aaron and the succession of his sons and their sons as high priests foreshadowed the role of His only begotten Son, Jesus, who is today the Christian's High Priest. Just as the Aaronic priests then mediated between God and Israel, so Christ now mediates between God and the Church, which is spiritual Israel.

As mediators, the priests acted out God's part by receiving, eating and ritually slaughtering the sacrifices offered by the worshippers. God called the offerings His food as opposed to the tithe which was the Levite's food and inheritance. The tithe was God's only insofar as the Levites were God's, being His chosen replacement for the offering of Israel's first born. God protected and defended the Levite's right to the tithe because they were His.

The priests never received tithes - only offerings, which were the food on God's sacrificial table. Israel gifted offerings to the divine and immortal God, and

Israel paid tithes to their mortal fellow tribe members, the Levites.

The priests received the offerings in the name of God: this is how God was their inheritance. Thus, the Bible expresses this truth by stating that the LORD gave to Aaron His right to the gifts of the altar. To Aaron and his sons were given all the offerings and sacrifices. That included the right to the offering of first fruits - especially the first born males of men and beasts.

Functional, Ritual & Symbolic Substitutions

Let's review this chain of substitutions. Since the Levites were chosen to replace the first born of all Israel, they belonged to God. Since what is God's belongs to the priests (He is their inheritance.), the Levites were given to the sons of Aaron.

At this point the only Israelites without an inheritance are the Levites. They had only small communities of adjacent households to dwell in. To make up for this inequity, God created the concept and law of the tithe to provide the Levites with their fair share in the Promised Land. All persons are promised an inheritance if they faithfully enter into covenant with God.

Obviously, a loving and just God would not allow His chosen servants to be exempted from the promise. This is the origin and rationale for the tithe. It is derived from the principle of the first fruits belonging to God, but it is not the offering of first fruits.

The tribe of Levi alone represented God's first fruits of men - the first born. All the first born belonged to God due to ancient revelation and the terms of His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Consequently, God gave all the Levites as an offering of first fruits to His priests the Aaronites, the descendants of Aaron.

The rest of the tribes of Israel now had in the Levites' a tribe of sanctified first born sons. The other tribes' first born sons were no longer family priests. Their first born sons were redeemed or ransomed by a single payment of five shekels to the Aaronites.

The Levites served the Aaronites instead of the first born from each family. They received the tithe from the Israelites' lands as their inheritance. The tithe was their wage for their service in Israel's stead: the Levites served at the tabernacle and temple in the place of all the first born sons of the other tribes.

There were symbolic as well as practical reasons for this system. Symbolically, Aaron, the high priest, and his sons represented the future Son of God. The

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high priests symbolized Jesus Christ, the first born of God. The Levites symbolized the first born of humanity, or the Church. Israel represented the rest of the world.

These three sets of first born each foreshadow one of the three biblical resurrections:

1. The Aaronites that of the Son of God, Jesus. (I Corinthians 15:20-23)
2. The Levites symbolize the First Resurrection at Messiah's return, announced by the seventh and last trumpet. (Revelation 20:4-6)
3. The Israelites as the Second Resurrection to Judgment, which takes place the end of the Millennium. (Revelation 20:5, 11-15)

Clarifying God's Administration

From the practical side, taking the one tribe of Levi in the place of the first born sons of all the tribes kept families together which obviously eliminated in advance many interpersonal problems. In contrast to patriarchal religious practice, the Levitical priesthood was a doctrinally and geographically centralized religious administration to serve the one God in one place.

The patriarchal religious system had been a very decentralized, autonomous, and disjointed family cult system that varied in belief and practice from clan to clan. Instead of one central altar and tabernacle, there had been many altars and shrines. Since each family or clan had their own.

The Levites as a tribe were supported by the tithe. They in turn tithed to the Aaronites, who did not receive tithes except as an "offering" from the Levites. The Aaronites received all of the sacrificial offerings, particularly the redemptions and sacrifices of the first born of clean beasts since God was their inheritance. Their duty was to spend all of their time in His service. The Levites served the Aaronites in the place of Israel's naturally first born sons and took care of the tabernacle and later the temple.

The Levites also served their brother Israelites directly in the cities where they lived by teaching and enforcing the law. The Levites served as the judges of last resort when local councils of elders or Judges could not come to a conclusion (II Chronicles 19:4-11 and Nehemiah 13:22). Because they did not receive agricultural land holdings in Canaan, they had a right to receive the tithe of that land's production. This gave them wages for their service.

Israel was obliged to pay Levi because Levi was performing work on their behalf. All Israel was promised the land of Canaan. It would have been unjust for Levi to be excluded because God chose them to serve Aaron. Thus, the Levites received the tithe as a proportional share of the promised inheritance.

The first mention of tithing in the Torah is Leviticus 27:30-33:

Thus, all the tithe of the land, of the seed, of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD. If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth to it.

And for every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed.

It is God's presence and or purpose that make anything holy. The tithe is holy because it was dedicated to the Levites who belonged to God. It was not God's food. Offerings were God's food. The tithe was holy in the same way that entire Promised Land was the Holy Land. (Zechariah 2:12)

Numbers chapter 18 gives a thorough summary of the laws delineating the legal rights of the Aaronites and Levites as well as their relationship between them. It includes references to the first born, tithes and other offerings. Read the whole chapter. The following are only selected excerpts:

Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, "Now, behold, I Myself have given you charge of My offerings, even all the holy gifts of the sons of Israel. I have given them to you as a portion, and your sons as a perpetual allotment. This shall be yours from the most holy gifts, reserved from the fire; every offering of theirs, even every grain offering and every sin offering and every guilt offering, which they shall render to Me, shall be most holy for you and for your sons.

"As the most holy gifts you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. This also is yours, the offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of sons of Israel; I have given them to you and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. Everyone of your household who is clean may eat it. All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they have given to the LORD, I have given them to you." (8-12)

"Every first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal... the first-born of man you shall surely redeem their redemption price, from a month old you shall redeem them, by your valuation, five shekels in silver." (15-16).

Then the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel.

"And to the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting." (20-21)

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For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore, I have said concerning them, "They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel..."

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe. And your offering shall be reckoned to you as the grain from the threshing floor or the full produce from the wine vat.

"So you shall also present an offering to the LORD from your tithes, which you receive from the sons of Israel; and from it you shall give the LORD's offering to Aaron the priest. Out of all your gifts you shall present every offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, the sacred part of them.'" (24-29)

God calls the Levites' tithe of the tithe to the Aaronites an offering to Him. This categorically proves that the use of the ten per cent figure in calculating an offering does not mean that it must be a tithe.

Moses Not a Priest

The Levites were not the priests of God but the priesthood's arms and legs. Aaron was selected as the first High Priest (Exodus 28). He was chosen over Moses because Aaron was the first born and had married a Levite while Moses was married to Zipporah, a daughter of Jethro, priest of Midian. (Exodus 2:15-3:1)

Moses was the mediator of the Sinai Covenant and not physically qualified to be a priest under the Levitical system God planned to establish in the desert. Similarly, Jesus was not qualified physically to be a priest, even though he was the mediator of the New or Jerusalem covenant becoming the ultimate ONE Mediator between God and man. (I Timothy 2:5)

Moses was not qualified to be a priest. The Torah obligated priests to marry the daughters of priests, or they could not be priests. Specific provisions existed for the support of priestly children, daughters in particular, who may have married someone who was not a priest and then later returned to her father's house. (See Leviticus 21:7-9, 13-15; 22: 12-16).

Aaron was Moses' older brother, the firstborn of Amram and a great-grandson of Levi. (I Chronicles 6:1-3) The firstborn had been designated as God's as shown above. All of the Israelite priests after the Levitical order were descended from Aaron, the first born of the first born. As God's, they were to receive as an offering from the Levites the very best of the entire tithe from the land, the firstlings of the Levitical inheritance, the tithe.

Originally, most of the priestly Aaronites lived near the tabernacle - in one place as opposed to the dispersed Levites. As the number of the Aaronites increased in population relative to the Levites, the priests were also found living in the Levitical cities, scattered amongst their non-priestly brethren. Nevertheless, the "tithe of the tithe" offering was always sent by the Levites to the Temple at Jerusalem for redistribution among the priestly families of Aaron.

Nehemiah 10:34-39 describes plainly the practical application of what was outlined in the Torah:

...in order that they might bring the first fruits of the ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually ... for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God...and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns.

And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chamber of the storehouse... Thus we will not neglect the house of our God. (35-39)

The often quoted denunciation of not honoring God with the tithes in Malachi 3:8-12 is actually referring to the "tithe of the tithe" brought to the Temple.

Of course, if the common man did not tithe to the Levite, then the Levite could not send their offering tenth to the Temple. This is how the individual Israelite was not to "neglect the house of our God."

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, "How have we robbed Thee?" In tithes and offerings...Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. (8-10)

Malachi's message dates to the time of Nehemiah. By comparing Nehemiah with Malachi, it is plain that only a tenth of the tithes collected for the Levites, which was an offering, went to the temple treasuries in Jerusalem. Malachi condemns holding back whatever is due God. He condemns the acts of putting mammon before God, the attitude that God is not real:

Your words have been arrogant against Me: says the LORD. Yet you say, "What have we spoken against Thee?"

You have said, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?" (Malachi 3:13-14)

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Chapter 4 - ON FEASTS AND TITHES

These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. (Deuteronomy 12:1)

The laws of the Sinai Covenant applied to Israel once they arrived in Canaan. They are still valid for anyone who wishes to live in the Promised Land, become a "son of the covenant" (a physical Israelite) through circumcision, and tithe to support temple worship when it is revived. The Law is not done away or abolished; it simply is not a requirement for salvation. Salvation is the inheritance of spiritual Israel.

When the Sinai Covenant was given, the LORD did not intend for the tribes to wander for forty years in the wilderness. He had originally planned immediate conquest and habitation of the cities of the dispossessed Canaanites and Amorites. But Israel rebelled in sin.

In the Bible the desert wilderness is symbolically a purifying environment. There is an absence of evil, for there is an absence of any tempting abundance, which so readily nourishes a forgetfulness of God and righteousness. The relative abundance of food and other good things of material life is one reason why the Israelites forgot God in Egypt. Many were reluctant to leave Egypt before Passover, and several times afterwards, the hardships of the desert inspired a popular desire to return to Egypt.

Festival Tithes and Offerings

In fact throughout her history Israel got many of the idols that ensnared her from Egypt. In the desert there were fewer idols. There certainly was no great abundance or increase. The wandering tribes lived from day to day, manna fall to manna fall, as God provided their sustenance. All that would change, and did change, once they entered the Promised Land. In Canaan there would be false gods, idols, and multiple places of worship and sacrifice. And there would be increase and abundance.

Continuing in Deuteronomy 12, the text distinctly lists several kinds of gifts. Our focus is on the tithes, first fruits and offerings in general, but there is much more to study not covered here:

But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the LORD your God shall choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. And there you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your free will

offerings, and the first-born of your herd and your flock.

There also you and your households shall eat before the LORD your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the LORD your God has blessed you. (5-7)

You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every cultic place you see. (12-13)

You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain, or new wine, or oil, or the first-born of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand.

But you shall eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God in all your undertakings.

Be careful that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land. (17-19)

The payment of tithes and the gift of offerings to the Levitical priesthood was an act of faithful worship towards God. One thing that is often overlooked in all the discussion about tithes and offerings is the fact that the giver, the Israelite paying the tithe or bringing the offering, took an active part in its consumption. He ate it together with his whole household, which included more people than we think of making up a household today. It was a community household that included the Levite, the widow, orphan and stranger.

This worship rightly occurred only at the place of worship with the priest - not at home, or "within your gates." Anciently, most of the meat people ate was sacrificial meat: unlike today, they did not usually eat meat otherwise. This is the primordial source of modern traditions to say grace or give thanks over a meal. The Israelites offered most of the meat they ate to God in sacrifice. However, God did allow them to eat meat at home that was not sacrificed. (See verses 15-16 and 20-28.)

Most unsacrificed meat was killed in hunting. These statutes provided a practical solution for those who wished to eat meat but who did not live close to the central Temple. In any case, the tithe or obligatory offerings were not to be eaten at home.

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The Third Tithe

In Deuteronomy 14 tithing is summarized and special provisions are made for its use in the third year. This is the chapter most ministers quote when they wish to teach more than one tithe. The idea is that the first tithe is for the Levite (read the preacher), the second tithe is for observing God's Holy Days (split between the preacher and the worshiper), the third tithe is for the stranger, widow and orphan and is only collected every third year (the short end of the deal).

How then, did some come to think that there were three tithes? This idea was based on a very narrow resolution of variant scriptural instructions about the tithe. In other words, the big picture was overlooked as words and sentences were compared.

The doctrine of three tithes is a product of narrow, exclusivist thinking without the balance of also considering a broader, more inclusive approach in trying to resolve apparent scriptural contradictions. The conclusion of whether there was, or is, more than one tithe seems to be linked to the potential tithe recipients' attitude towards their economic need. Let's look at the scriptures.

In Numbers 18 the right to the tithe is presented clearly as the substitute for landed inheritance.

The tribe of Levi is taken in the place of the firstborn sons of every tribe. The tithe is the compensation for the Levitical priesthood. Just as the other tribes were given the rights to land that had to be worked, Levi was given the right to a tithe of the land's production for wages. As the Israelite worked his fields, so the Levite worked at the tabernacle or temple. In both cases, the rights to an inheritance did not mean a free ride. Those inheritances had to be worked to produce food.

If anyone will not work, neither let him eat. (II Thessalonians 3:10)

And to the sons of Levi,

...behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting. (2-1)

and

...for it is your compensation in return for your service in the tent of meeting. (31)

The other dispossessed, the widow, orphan, poor and alien, are not mentioned because they are not substituted for the first born. Furthermore, they are only temporarily without an inheritance due to their temporary inability to work it. They do no service to God for the tribes of Israel to justify receiving wages from them.

Misfortune does not give to its sufferers an eternal right to the tithe, the Levites' promised inheritance, because they are only temporarily experiencing a lack of access to a fair share of the rightful inheritance, but suffering did warrant the consideration of a merciful Lawgiver. The poor were allowed to share in the collective inheritance of all Israel through eating some of the tithe.

God promised all Israel an inheritance. Widows and orphans could not fully benefit from their land since they could not work it. God then took the role of husband and father to them. He took from His work and supported them out of the wages of His first born, the Levites.

As a result, the Levite may not have had all of the use of his income, but he was never without and he did not share or give up any of the right to the tithe. It is wrong to conclude that there was more than one tithe simply because it served more than one purpose.

Poor people are forever present in a nation, but with God's social program it would not always be the same ones. The laws regarding Israelite slavery, the sabbatical year of release and the great Sabbatical Year of the Jubilee took care of that. (See Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25.)

Trust and Obey

Tithing in ancient Israel was an act of continuing trust in God as the guarantor of their inheritance. This obligatory act of worship also overlapped with the observance of independently sanctified feast days. Israel's worship was only legal through the mediation of the Aaronic priesthood which the Levites and all the tribes supported with their offerings. As a symbolic type of the ultimate mediator between God and man, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies or consult God by the Urim and Thummim.

It was not possible to actively worship God apart from the central tabernacle or temple and its priesthood under the Sinai Covenant. That's what priestly mediation is all about.

Therefore, tithing directly supported temple worship and indirectly the priests through the Levites' offering (determined by a "tithe of the tithe"). Sharing the inheritance with the poor was an act of worship, too. This principle is reflected in the letter by Jesus' half brother, James. James was the leading elder of the Jerusalem church, which observed all of the Sinai Covenant in addition to the New Testament.

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27)

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Righteousness starts a cycle of ever increasing goodness and material prosperity grounded on spiritual faith and obedience. Disobedience, which derives from a lack of faith, leads to poverty. First the Israelites would suffer, then there would be less for the Levites, and finally there would be more poor with whom increasing scarcity had to be split. With scarcity there comes human inequality and strife, and eventually, the humility that can lead to repentance.

Scarcity finds its origin in abundance where human greed multiplies in the pride of the power of wealth. It is a never ending human cycle due to the changeableness of each man's willingness to love in the face of God's unchanging eternal purpose of making love a part of every man's being.

The same ministers who teach that there is more than one tithe rely on Deuteronomy 14 for proof. To them verses 22-27 refer to the second tithe or festival tithe which the Israelite hypothetically used to celebrate by feasting at (or, keeping the) festival holy days of God listed in Leviticus 23.

For some, the Bible supposedly talks of a third tithe in verse 28 because of its different treatment every three years (the third and sixth years of the seven year cycle).

You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. And you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and your flock, in order that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

And if the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the LORD your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the LORD your God blesses you, then you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

And you may spend the money for whatever your heart desires, for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household. "Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you. (Deuteronomy 14:22-27)

Note that the Levite is mentioned in the provision or description of this second tithe. If the Levites received the entire first tithe, their inheritance, as the proponents of three tithes contend they did, then why the mention of not forsaking and neglecting the Levite who is in your town because he has no inheritance?

Should he have more than his fair share? A double inheritance? (The one tenth they got is already more than a one twelfth or thirteenth share of the Promised Land due them based on an equal division of the land.) Simply read, this must be same tithe and responsibility is mentioned in Deuteronomy 12:12, 19.

Spiritual Purpose for Tithing

Clearly, the context shows that the individual Israelite substantially determined how he used God's tithe. That is how it should be if the spiritual purpose for tithing is to build righteous character.

How each person determined his increase and portioned out his tithe was a test of his heart, an exercise in obedience that both teaches love and comes from love. God was concerned first with the heart of the individual Israelite and after that with the material welfare of the Levite, so freedom of choice played a role in administering the tithe.

God could take care of His Levites. The question for them was whether they shared His concern for the welfare of the people. Jesus' parables and condemnation of the religious hypocrites of His day demonstrates this divine concern as well as Ezekiel 34.

The tithe was consumed at festivals in national celebration of God's deliverance - His gift to them of the Promised Land. The Israelite had to work his inheritance in order to receive its benefits as God granted the increase. The Levite had to work for the Israelite in serving the priests at the temple in order to receive the benefits of his inheritance, too. Both were consuming the fruits of their labors. Note also that the servants and all the relatives were to eat of this tithe at the festivals as well. (Deuteronomy 12; 12, 18; 14:26)

Deuteronomy 16 gives a repetitive description of rejoicing and consuming the tithe in the observance of the feasts of the LORD. The Passover does not talk about the dispossessed because of the strict cultic requirements to participate: only circumcised males and their families could eat the Passover. However, the other two seasons, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles do not have these restrictions. They were open to all of the community:

And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite who is in your town, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst, in the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name. And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. (11-12)

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And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. Seven days you shall celebrate a feast to the LORD your God in the place which the WRD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and all the work of your hands, so that you shall be altogether joyful. (14-15)

In actuality then, a careful reading of these scriptures shows that God planned to accomplish all of His religious services with the one tithe in addition to the various, previously mentioned sacrifices. The one tithe supplied one need: food in general to the unlanded Levite and poor and food for feasting in celebration of the fulfillment of God's promise.

One Tithe Not Three

The threefold mention of the Levites in each of the three supposed tithes is a strong indication that there was only one tithe. The other landless people were not mentioned in Numbers 18 because the Levites were the only ones granted the inheritance rights to the tithe. They were the God ordained landless tribe taken in place of the first born of all Israel. For that reason, they were the primary beneficiaries of the tithe.

If there really were three different tithes, God would have more clearly differentiated the purposes for each of those tithes by specifically categorizing who received which one - just as the ministers who today preach multiple tithes spell out how each is to be spent. The Old Testament is full of rather specific statutes and ordinances - many of which are expressed and/or repeated for the sake of clarity.

In fact there aren't three tithes. There is only one. It is just that who receives what and when overlaps. The choice is largely left in the hand of the giver who shares according to how God has blessed him. (Read Deuteronomy 12:5-19; 14:22-28; 26:122-15; Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-32 and Nehemiah 10:34-39 for a review.)

If God had spiritually blessed him through the Levite, then surely the Levite would have been materially blessed in return by the Israelite. The variable was not God's will but the will of the men involved, both Levite and Israelite.

God's overriding moral objection was to develop a right spiritual attitude in both the giver and the receiver. The right attitude was important, whether it was a Levite or an Israelite. Both had to learn by sharing and giving. It was a behavioral method of training right character into the hearts or psyche of the people. It was an exercise with the objective of conforming a nation of diverse and conflicting

human wills and ideas about what is right and wrong to God's one will and definition of righteous love.

This is why the choice was always in the hand of the giver. He had to choose to obey and how fully he would obey. Beyond obedience, lies the need to grown into generosity and genuine concern for his neighbor who was defined as anyone in need: the Levite, poor, widow, orphan and alien.

The fact of history remains, however, that community pressure or the king's army, could enforce the payment of the tithe. Obedience to the law of tithing did not necessarily mean that the tither was generous or righteous in his heart. Eternal life is only given to those who truly give of themselves. All of us are exceptionally wealthy in the western world - even those who think they are poor. Just travel to some of the less advantaged places or see them on TV. All of us need to listen to this lesson of Jesus:

"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother...'"

And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth."

And when Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

And when he heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich. And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

And they who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God." (Luke 18:18-27)

Why God Legislated Only One Tithe

There were several reasons why God did not legislate more than one tithe:

1. a mandatory levy of multiple tithes was less effective than one tithe to mold human attitudes;
2. the tithe was already in addition to previously existing thank and first fruit offerings as well as to some newly ordained offerings pertaining to the tabernacle (and later the temple);

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3. and any additional tithing of the land's increase was considered by God to be oppressive as stated in relation to the King's Second Tithe covered next.

God's promised economic support of His work and the poor could be accomplished on a single tithe of ten per cent; therefore, the LORD commanded only one tithe. As there was only one inheritance, so there was only one tithe. God provided for the poor directly from the inheritance by commanding that the corners of the fields be left, and indirectly through additional support from the Levites' inheritance - the tithe.

Thus, there was no First Tithe only for the Levite. There was no Festival or Second Tithe for the feast goer and the poor, and there was no Third Tithe for the widow, orphan, stranger, and disadvantaged collected every three years. There was only one tithe for all three purposes.

What functionally happened was a change in how the one tithe was distributed during the third year to emphasize the need to support the Levite, alien, widow and orphan. It was a check on human greed, and it was an exercise in faith and generosity. It was insurance that adequate support would be available for those God had committed to support.

The Land Sabbath Cycle

This program applied to the third and sixth years of the seven-year land sabbath cycle. During the seventh year, only what grew of itself was picked as needed to live. This gave the land rest. The tithes were obviously less in these years. (See Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25.)

At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of the produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of our hand which you do. (Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

This third year of tithing is why Amos 4:4 refers to the tithes being brought in every third day or year. Deuteronomy 26:3-15 also records a statement the Israelite was to make when paying his tithe.

In this declaration the payment of the entire tithe in the third (and sixth) year made it "the year of tithing" because this was the only year that the entire tithe left the Israelite's household. During these two years of the seven year cycle, an Israelite did not have any legal discretion over how the tithe was spent.

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the

orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

And you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Thy commandments which Thou hast commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Thy commandments. (Deuteronomy 26:12-13)

The rest of the time the Israelite and his household consumed a fair portion of the tithe at seasonal feasts. The head of a household had at his discretion how much of his family's tithe was to be used by the household at the feasts and how much was to be given to the neighboring Levite and the needy in his community. Often the poor lived on the fringes of the more prosperous households and farming villages. The book of Ruth records some of these customs as they were practiced.

Tithe = Tithes

A final note to those who may have at one time been confused about the number of tithes God commanded in the Bible. It is incorrect to assume that the English word "tithes" indicates more than one category of ten per cent, or decimation, because it ends in an "s" and seems to be plural. Any plurality can only be read into the scriptural content because the Hebrew word used for "tithe" or "tenth" is singular in every case.

Check any analytical concordance. The Hebrew word *ma'aser* is translated into English as "tithes." The Hebrew can be properly rendered in either the singular or plural based on the translator's discretion of what would be the best English usage, but it means one ten percent portion: If more than one tithe has been meant, it probably would have been written in the original Hebrew as "ma'aserim" instead.

The Bible never quotes God discussing, "My Three Tithes." There was only one tithe of ten percent, but that one tithe was taken from several different sources: grain, herds, flocks, fruit, wine and other agricultural products.

This is the only way in which a single tithe could be considered plural: because the tithes were one ten per cent each of several different sources of animal and plant agricultural production. The tithe was single donor family's collection of multiple one tenths from varied categories or agricultural areas of production.

There is no reference to tithing on monetary income from trade, mining, professional skills or investment in real estate, which was separated from the tribal inheritances and allowed in cities but not on the family farms. In fact, city property was not subject to the land Sabbath, debt forgiveness or Jubilee restoration.

Chapter 5 - THE KING'S TITHE

How did tithing fit into the civil government of ancient Israel? What was actually done? Who had control? How many tithes were collected and for what reason?

The Israelites under Joshua invaded the land of Canaan. They did not completely conquer it and drive all of the nations out. As a result, a number of the cities remained in the hands of the Amorites and Canaanites. These cities were ruled by kings. The Philistine cities were ruled by a confederation of lords or brother kings.

God used these foreign powers to punish His people when they disobeyed Him. The Israelites never learned the lesson for long. Obviously, during an actual period of servitude to foreign powers, the children of Israel would cry out to the LORD, their King, for deliverance. God would then send a savior, a judge, to deliver them in His name. But too often, the now freed Israelites, still faithless, looked to the human agent of their deliverance rather than to the LORD God, their Savior.

Jacob's descendants then came to a very human conclusion. Being blind to the cause of their problems, their sin, these patriarchs of old, sought to neutralize the effect of their sin. Instead of repenting and changing their lifestyle, they changed their government. In their human eyes it was the lack of kingly organization that led to their defeat at the hands of the Canaanites, Amorites, and Philistines. To them, that was the cause of their problem and not their sin. Their answer was to have their own king to lead them in battle.

Give Us a King!

So the children of Israel rebelled against the LORD, their Savior King. First, they tried to make their own king without consulting God. They asked Gideon to rule over them.

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, "Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son's son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian." But Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you." (Judges 8:22-23)

So some of the Israelites and their allies, the Shechemites, conspired with Abimelech, a son of Gideon by a concubine, to make him king. To that end they killed all the other sons of Gideon but one, Jotham, who escaped. (Judges 9) After three years of rule over Israel, Abimelech was betrayed and killed in the civil wars he started.

After a few more years of difficult times - primarily at the hands of the Philistines, the Israelites tried again. This time they went to Samuel to ask a king of their own people from God. (I Samuel 8:4-6) They still had not recognized God as their deliverer through a man chosen for the purpose, or that their sins were the cause of their slavery, misery and oppression. Samuel recoiled from the request as it would put a man in the place of the LORD God, much as the Pope is in the place of Christ according to Catholic tradition, but::

The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.

Like all the deeds which they have done since the day I brought them up from Egypt even to this day - in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods - so they are doing to you also." (I Samuel 8:7-8)

No longer were the children of Israel to be directly ruled by their God King, but by an intermediary, human king, albeit an Israelite who ruled in the name of God. God allowed this arrangement as a teaching type of His future Messiah King, Jesus, who as a man begotten of God, is the mediator between God and man.

Since just the existence of a human kingship would be oppressively costly, God knew that this oppression would also be politically intensified by at least some of the human kings. It was all a part of teaching man that he is incapable of ruling himself - whether it be on a personal or national level.

God revealed His thoughts by instructing Samuel to tell the Israelites the manner and custom by which they would be ruled. In short it would be oppressive, a chosen slavery by their own people instead of the liberty of faith in God as their Deliverer. The human king would also take a tithe of the best of the produce. This was considered by God to be one of the oppressions of human rule or administration.

And he will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. And he will take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants...

He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants. Then you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day. (I Samuel 8:14-18)

This is the only mention of a second distinct tithe in the Old Testament. It was the tax taken by the civil government, the kingship demanded by the people. God called it oppressive because it would forcibly take more than ten per cent of the people's increase.

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Second Tithe = Civil Tax

The Israelites became the servants, or slaves, of their kings because they spent many long working hours to pay for their royal security blankets, the king and his army. There is no mention of a third tithe.

This second tithe was not commanded by God, but by a human king who used it to support himself, including his governmental, political and military, power base. It had nothing to do with the Kingdom of God but with the Babylonish practice of human kingship, which is a form of idolatry because it places a human government between, or before, the people and their God. This is why God calls kingship the worship of false gods. Thus, this second tithe is linked to Babylon, idolatry and slavery - not to the Feast as some claim.

The clear implication here is that the king's taking of a second tithe, over and above what was already going to the Levites, would be seriously oppressive - oppressive to the point that the people would eventually rebel against their own chosen kings. It was natural that the king would take the typical ten per cent tax. It was unnatural that the king's normal ten per cent tax was added on top of the first tithe paid to the Levites for the Temple service. Thus, the king's tithe became a second tithe.

In actuality what happened was that the king used the Levites to fill much of his administration and took practical control of a full twenty per cent of a nation's agricultural production plus whatever else he wanted. The Levites became part of the civil administration to preserve access to their income. As a consequence, they now served two masters: God and mammon, which led to spiritual compromise. Jesus addressed this continuing issue in Matthew 6:24:

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

The king could do this because he had a permanent army. This professional army was a new innovation for Israel. Under the judges, a volunteer militia was the sole military force available to fight outside invaders. With a voluntary militia there was no power base to fight over, making it difficult for one man or tribe to oppress another.

Often the king's palace guard, would be made up of his relatives, friends, and hired mercenaries owing no loyalty to anyone but to the king who, of course, paid wages for their loyalty. In David's case the army was commanded by his half nephew, Joab; his other half nephews, Abishai and Asahel were heads of "the mighty men"; Benaiah was over the

Cherethites and Pelethites (both terms for clans of Philistines); Zadok was the head of the priests, who as a group are listed as part of the David's kingly administration. David's sons were chief ministers.

The Levites were the tax and tithe collectors, for both king and God. They kept the stores in their cities scattered throughout the tribal inheritances. Since these cities were not part of any regional tribe, they were a natural extension of the king's central administration. The tithes were used to build and keep the Levitical cities for both king and God. Comparison with other ancient kingdoms shows that the primary use of these cities and their stores was for monarchical government including the support and quartering of the king's armies and chariots.

Read II Samuel 8:15-18 and I Chronicles 11:1-47 and note how many of the professional guard were foreigners, the best known being Uriah, the Hittite in verse 41. See also I Chronicles 26:20-28 where the Levites are shown to have the administrative function of keeping the king's treasures. No doubt they kept a catalog and the accounting necessary to effect the distribution of the tithe produce.

Additional insight comes from the reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah. Here the role of the king as enforcer of the Law is demonstrated. The implication is that for most of their history the Israelites did not tithe except as a particular king enforced the collection. Read all of II Chronicles 31. Note the separate references to tithes and first fruits. Hezekiah:

...commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the law of the LORD. And as soon as the order spread, the sons of Israel provided in abundance the first fruits of grain, new wine, oil, honey, and all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of all.

And the sons of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah, also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of sacred gifts which were consecrated to the LORD their God, and placed them in heaps. (4-6)

The rest of the chapter describes this bureaucracy at work. The number of Aaronites had grown so that not all of them lived near the Temple, but they all served at the Temple in rotating shifts of service. Interestingly, the schedule was set up and enforced by the king.

The king had military control of the Temple and its storehouses of wealth. Since this wealth was de facto the king's, who was the state, it is obvious that he protected it as his own, though dedicated to God. Often the Temple was plundered to payoff invaders. (See I Kings 15:18; II Kings 12:18; 18:15.)

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Nehemiah's Reforms

In Ezra's and Nehemiah's time there were only a few thousand Jews and Benjaminites, so the tithes were not enough to support the Temple service. (The other tribes were lost to history.) Nehemiah's solution was the levying of a temple tax of one third shekel yearly per head of household. (Nehemiah 10:32)

The temple tax came in the place of the ten per cent tax the kings of Israel had formerly exacted. Note that Hezekiah provided for the king's portion of offerings (II Chronicles 31:3), which were identical to the offerings paid for by Nehemiah's one third shekel temple tax. (Nehemiah 10:33) The offerings supported the Aaronic priests, and the tithe supported the Levites.

Nehemiah 13:10-14 relates the historical restoration of the tithes to the Levites as well as demonstrating that the tithe(s) of Malachi 3:10 were really offerings. Again it is enforced by the civil leader, though the actual tax, and tithe collectors were the locally situated Levites. (10:38 previously quoted) This is the challenge referred to in Malachi 3:8-9:

Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me!

But you say, "How have we robbed Thee?"

In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.

The **Encyclopedia Judaica** and other Jewish sources relate that in the Persian and Maccabean periods, the Jewish religious assembly or Sanhedrin, began to teach that the entire first tithe should go to the Temple. The sources often quoted by the commentaries and ministers that teach the existence of multiple tithes usually date, or have their roots, in, this period of history before Jesus.

The teaching of more than one tithe came out of the religious leaders' monetary necessity.

The small group of Levites and priests who returned to Judea from Babylon was in need of cash. Even the area of the freed inheritance had shrunk, not just the size of the population working it. One tithe of such a reduced base did not seem sufficient to support a proportionately large number of priests and leaders.

A greatly reduced population base was all that was left to support a proportionately more numerous religious leadership. Also by this time the number of Aaronic priests had grown so large in relation to the number of Levites that for the Levites to keep ninety

per cent of the entire tithe was ludicrous. This situation led to further distortions in tithe administration.

By Jesus' day the distinction between Levite and Aaronite priest seems to have practically disappeared when it came to distributing the tithes. Many of the religious leaders were not even Levites, much less sons of Aaron. The tithe was allotted to Levite, Aaronite and others based on individual need and station instead of by strict clan affiliation. In practice the offering called the Levites' "tithe of the tithe" grew to swallow up or include the entire tithe.

Tithing in Second Temple Times

In order to justify keeping the entire first tithe, the assembly of priests (Sadducees) and righteous separatists (Pharisees) came up with a second tithe to be used for celebrating the Feasts. This precedent is sometimes cited by ministers who believe in such a festival tithe.

Throughout the last two thousand years, attempts have been made to scholastically justify this second tithe as a solution to the apparent contradictions of the tithing provisions discussed above. The problem rests in confusion between the rights to the tithe and those who were blessed by consuming the actual meat and produce.

In Deuteronomy 14 the consumption of the tithe was shared between worshiper, the poor and the Levite. In Numbers 18 it seemed that the entire tithe went to the Levites and Aaronites. That's because Numbers 18 discusses the permanent legal right to the tithe as the Levites' inheritance and the payment for their service at the temple. It does not deal with temporary aid to the poor at all. That is simply not the subject of that chapter, so it is not mentioned.

Since it is not possible for one man to know the motives of another for sure, it is best to assume that all those who have in the past or who currently teach multiple tithes do so out of sincerity. That's the way they saw or see it. Regardless of motive, in the Second Temple

Period from about 500 BC to 70 AD, the human, rationally devised solution to meet an increased economic need was "revenue enhancement" by restoring the double tithe of the civil kingdom period instead of maintaining the single tithe of God's originally ordained and divine kingship as provided by the original constitution, the Sinai Covenant.

The Sanhedrin's teaching of two tithes was in fact an interpretive custom or stipulation designed to materially benefit a theocratic government dominated by a powerful few - both Pharisees and Sadducees. It was oppressive, so the people mostly ignored it as God had anticipated.

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During His ministry on earth, Jesus condemned the religious leaders' greed and lack of concern for the common man. In Luke 10:30-37 the priest and the Levite pass the Jewish man beaten by robbers on the road. He is saved by the Good Samaritan.

Today the words, Good Samaritan, leave a favorable impression on the English speaking mind, but to the ancient Jews the most detestable race of men on earth were the Samaritans. In His parable Jesus effectively communicated God's negative opinion of the priests' and Levites' too common lack of love for their neighbor.

In Matthew 15:1-9 Jesus specifically comments on how the Pharisees and scribes profited by voiding one of the Ten Commandments, "Honor your father and your mother."

Based on narrow and twisted logic, they had worked out a legal way to get money into the temple treasury instead of into the pockets of needy parents. Money in the treasury benefitted those who controlled it, that is, those who made the interpretive human traditions that effectively circumvented God's plain commandment. As Jesus said:

Woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the other.
(Luke 11:42)

God had commanded a single tithe to the Temple and its Levitical priesthood. That one tithe was to be compensation for the Levites' loving ministry to the people in the name of God, but they failed to uphold God's name because they were human, fleshy and imperfect in every way. The Jewish elders had by and large earned the condemnation of God because of their additions to His Holy Law, which transformed it from a way of teaching love to pointless legalism. However, any changes man may try to make will only last for awhile; then God intervenes.

Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit. (Matthew 15:13-14)

The Pharisees of old judged themselves and earned their own sentence. So it's not surprising to see modern religious leaders who do likewise. Men rise and fall in accord with the blessings of their ways or the curses of their self-inflicted destruction derived from various human weaknesses like hypocritical greed or convenient Biblical ignorance.

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Chapter 6 - PRINCIPLES OF GIVING in the OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament teaches many general principles of giving that reappear in the New Testament. As the Bible is indeed the expression of the One Mind of God found in many books, it is fitting to point out some of these passages and principles as a way of transition to the New Testament. I think that one of the most important scriptures about money in the whole Bible is Deuteronomy 8:18:

But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:18 points out that God goes beyond basic human need by granting those who obey Him in faith the power to make wealth.

Wealth is not survival; it is beyond that and into the accumulation of material strength and power. By itself money is not evil, but it can become "a root of all kinds of evil." God does not usually bless us with instantaneous riches because large sums of money easily obtained can corrupt. But God does give us the ability to work and create wealth through the use of our minds and bodies, if...

Yes, there is an "if." God has a purpose for wealth, which is to authenticate His Promise, or confirm His covenant. That purpose implies the extension of His covenant rule over our own lives and through them as a witness to others. We must choose God's will as our own will. If we do, if a person's will in the matter of wealth conforms to His, then there is unlimited power, both spiritual and material, available to him to create wealth.

In Ephesians 4:28 one reason for Christian wealth is given:

Let him who steals no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.

Many scriptures condemn the lazy who live off the dole, or waste a life in drunkenness or drug dependency. In balance, the Bible is also very adamant about our personal responsibility to give our neighbor reasonable material aid in time of need. It also warns us not to go into debt for the purposes of aiding our brother, for personal consumption or for an expression or extension of pride.

Our whole society, our church congregations, are strengthened when each member is economically self-sufficient. God would have each man and woman free from economic servitude. Too many live under a self-imposed slavery to creditors resulting from the excessive and/or unwise use of debt. Some suffer from various expressions of socially imposed oppression like discrimination in property ownership, access to capital, access to opportunity and evaluation of performance.

But the biggest abuse is the fact that most of society puts the burden of aiding the poor and disadvantaged on the faceless federal or state government. Not only is this less efficient, it is literally passing the buck. When you pass the buck, the costs are always greater in the end - both socially and financially.

When someone receives aid administered in this manner, he usually does not solve the cause of the problem because most social problems come from very personal and individual causes. Unless the cause is properly identified and dealt with, the consequence is a double loss: the unfortunate person remains economically dependent on society for survival and he doesn't grow spiritually in an atmosphere of freedom.

Proverbs is full of advice about money and giving. The following proverb says to honor God "from your wealth." God gives to the poor: He doesn't rob them. The point is to put God first in your life for He is the giver of life.

Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. (Proverbs 3:9-10)

We should never forget, even if we know we are poor, to be thankful and generous. There is always someone who is worse off.

There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered. (Proverbs 12:24-25)

It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it. (Proverbs 10:22)

Life comes from God and not from any material source, represented by money. Mammon [Wealth] is the deceitful provider of a physical life ending in death. God gives life eternal.

He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf." Proverbs 11:4-5: Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. (Proverbs 12:28)

Ill-gotten gains do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death. (Proverbs 10:2)

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God wants us to prosper, but in righteousness there is no easy money. True, God blessed wealth comes by hard, honest, mental and physical labor. God is not a slot machine who pays out if you pay in, regardless of the consequences of the payout. He is ever mindful of our real needs. Wealth gotten God's way endures and blesses.

And everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the LORD's contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. (Exodus 35:21)

Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles, but the one who gathers by labor increases it. (Proverbs 13:11)

The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat. (Proverbs 13:4)

He who increases his wealth by interest and usury, gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor. (Proverbs 28:8)

He who tills his land will have plenty of food, but he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty. A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 28:19-20)

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, and the wealth of a sinner is stored up for the righteous. (Proverbs 13:22)

To prosper, man must keep God first in his life.

How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen above silver. (Proverbs 17:16)

The reward of humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor, and life. (Proverbs 22:4)

Generosity is an indication that money is not the "heart" or "eye" of a person. God's blessings are more than material. Material generosity is often rewarded spiritually.

He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his good to the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)

A warning about being co-signer or security for another:

Do not be among those who give pledges, among those who become sureties for debts. If you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take your bed from under you? (Proverbs 22:26-27)

How does God want His Work financed? The Work of God in the Old Testament was the work of the Tabernacle with its priesthood and sacrifices. What is important to Him? It hasn't changed: it is the attitude of the giver.

And Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel saying, This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, "Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD's contribution." (Exodus 35:4-5)

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Chapter 7 - TITHING IN PROPHECY

Perhaps by now you can see how difficult it is to really understand tithing and giving without understanding the Biblical history of the people of Israel. Many Bible students stop right here and go to the New Testament and present age of the church.

I have found it a help to first review the future, the history yet to be, in order to better understand the New Testament and the present. Therefore, any study of the Bible about giving is incomplete if it does not address the future role of tithing in the Messiah's soon coming kingdom of heaven on earth.

The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom whose inheritors are immortal. "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (I Corinthians 15:50)

But this kingdom of spirit beings will rule over a physical world inhabited by nations of mortal people.

And Thou has made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth. (Revelation 5:10)

And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations. (Revelation 2:26)

Now it will come about that in the last days, the mountain of the house of the LORD will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths."

For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2-3)

These prophecies and many others show that when Jesus returns as conquering King and political Messiah, He will rule from Jerusalem. The place of His throne will be the Temple, which will be restored prior to His return. This restoration of the Temple will necessitate a restored Levitical priesthood and the resumption of tithing to support it. Jesus did not come to change or abolish the Law the first time, neither will He when He returns in the future. (Matthew 5:17-20)

Here is where Malachi chapter 3 really belongs - in the future! Read what it says before the oft quoted verses 8-12.

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord (Messiah), whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you

delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

"And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old.

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be swift to witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien, and do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts.

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes, and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you." says the LORD of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?" (Malachi 3:1-7)

Remember the Law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. (Malachi 4:4)

Part of that return to observing the whole Law of Moses was to tithe within the context of a restored, temple and Levitical priesthood as mentioned two times in the above verses. (Malachi 3:8-12)

Do the ministers who quote these verses to support their teaching on tithing also tell you to keep the rest of the Law of Moses? Do they preach that God is going to purify the Levites so that they will again receive the tithe, which will be shared with widows, orphans and the alien? Do they mention that God is coming to purify the Aaronites so that they will once again receive sacrificial offerings of beasts on God's altar?

Most likely not. They usually interpret the Bible to declare: "Thou shalt tithe to this ministry of Jesus. If you don't, then y-o-u are a s-i-n-n-e-r!" In so teaching, they have done what Jesus Himself said He would not do: they have changed the Law.

Malachi is a prophecy for the future. Its application in principle today is more complex, but the conclusion should be clear: There is no justification to pull the ordinances of tithing out of their historical and temple ritual contexts - which are past or future and not present, and apply them to a Christian ministry.

Ezekiel chapters 40-48 describe in detail the restored Temple and rebuilt capital city of Jerusalem. The inheritances of the tribes of Israel will once again be farmed by descendants of ancient

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Israelites and naturalized aliens (circumcised according to the Sinai Covenant) who are adopted into the various tribes among whom they live. The produce of those inheritances will provide the sacrificial offerings and tithes for the service or work of the altar.

There will also be a restored and purified Levitical priesthood that conforms to both Sinai and New Covenants:

Thus says the Lord GOD, "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary. But the Levites who went far from me, when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, shall bear punishment for their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house and ministering in the house; they shall slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them..."

"But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 44:9-15)

Moreover, they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the clean and the unclean. And in a dispute they shall take their stand to judge; they shall judge it according to My ordinances. They shall also keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts, and sanctify My Sabbaths. (23-24)

And it shall be with regard to an inheritance for them, that I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel - I am their possession. They shall eat the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs. And the first of all the first fruits of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; you shall also give to the priest the first of your dough to cause a blessing to rest on your house. (28-30)

"And it will come about that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance among yourselves and among the aliens who stay in your midst, who bring forth sons in your midst. And they shall be to you as the native-born among the sons of Israel; they shall be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it will come about that in the tribe with which the alien stays, there you shall give him his inheritance," declares the Lord God. (47:22-23)

So will be fulfilled the restoration or refreshing of all things as promised and predicted in Acts 3:19-20:

Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may

come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.

Chapter 8 - THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM

"What?!" you might say. "I thought all that was done away by Jesus when He came and died for us." You would be partially right because animal sacrifices do not wash away human sin or release the Holy Spirit to us as a saving gift. For these more important matters of eternal life Jesus came the first time to live, die and be resurrected. That comes in the next chapters.

First, back to the prophecies. The why's are perhaps open to debate, but the Bible indeed prophesies both the rebuilding of the Temple and the resumption of animal sacrifices in connection with the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings.

Space prohibits extensive discussion in this book, but I will outline some of the why's and wherefore's and some of the scriptures that relate to them. (Daniel 11:31-12:3; Matthew 24:15; Revelation 6:9-11; 11:1-14 are some.)

The Bible is a collection of books making up what is generally referred to as the Old Testament and the New Testament. But just as the Bible is One collection of many books, so it is One Covenant with several expressions or magnifications of that One Covenant as applied to different contexts of time and place, and in dimensions temporal or eternal.

The primary divisions are the Old and New Testaments. I prefer to call them the Sinai Covenant and the New Testament. Both are really expansions upon the original Promise made to Abraham, the father of the faithful. They are simply different teaching methods and contextual applications of One Truth originating from One God.

The New Testament does not take the place of the Old or Sinai Covenant: it completes it. The Sinai Covenant and the New Testament are complementary - performing different functions in God's unified, overall program to educate all peoples in His ways.

God's Promise to Abraham

Genesis 17:1-8 relates God's promise to Abraham. The Promise is actually made up of a number of more specific promises. Abraham was to become the father of many nations of physical human beings. His designated heirs were to inherit the promised land of Canaan as an eternal possession. This Promise was passed down to the children of Israel who did inherit the land for some hundreds of years.

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their

generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojourn, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (7-8)

God promised an eternal possession. This implies eternal life. In Genesis 22:16-18 reference is made to "the" seed in whom all nations of the earth would become blessed, i.e. Jesus Christ, Yeshua and Messiah. It is through Jesus' sacrifice that sin is blotted out. Without sin to separate man from God, God can place His Holy Spirit within us, co-present with the human spirit of creative identity.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:16-17)

Ultimately, God will grant believing mankind - Abraham's spiritual sons of faith - the earth as an eternal possession. To possess anything eternally implies an eternal life which is only possible with an immortal existence.

The Sinai Covenant

The eternal conditions of God's covenant promise with Abraham were spoken to the children of Israel from Mount Sinai: The Ten Commandments. Just as God spoke His promise of an inheritance and a Savior to Abraham so He spoke the Law. (Exodus Chapter 20)

He then wrote them with His own finger on two tablets of stone (Exodus 31: 18), which were called the "words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments." (Exodus 34:28) Jesus came to magnify the law, not do away with it. (Isaiah 42:21 and Matthew 5:17-20)

Written in the Book of the Covenant were other statutes and judgments based on the foundation of the Ten Commandments. These were conditional stipulations that specifically applied to the children of Israel in their time and/or when living in the Land of Promise.

The Torah Law includes many civil laws and legislation designed for a nation of mortal men living over three thousand years ago. They were the practical application of the Ten Commandments in that ancient social context. Altogether, they expanded upon the simple promise of temporal and eternal life in an eternal inheritance, which God had originally made with Abraham and initially fulfilled in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded me to teach you, that you might do

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them in the land where you are going to possess it.
(Deuteronomy 6:1)

God gave the statutes and judgments through Moses to pass on to the Israelites in his capacity as their civil ruler or judge. They were to be followed by those circumcised and adopted into the nation of the tribes of Israel. The actual genealogical heritage made little difference except for the priesthood.

Israel is simply the covenant name of those who believe God's Promise enough to live by it in the obedience of its stipulations or requirements.

The laws were to be followed in the land where God was King. Most of the daily governance was handled on a local basis under the leadership or judgeship of elders selected by the people themselves. (Deuteronomy 1:9-18; 16:18-20 and elsewhere.) The only functioning central government was God as represented by the mortal Levitical Priesthood. The Levites and priests were to teach the Law and judge those problems brought to them that the elders could not settle by themselves.

This was a national magnification and practical application of the original covenant between God and Abraham. Moses codified it in the wilderness. It is contained in the first five books of the Bible called the Torah, or Teaching Law. I prefer to call it the Sinai Covenant instead of the Old Testament because of its eternal and prophetic relevance.

The Sinai Covenant created a kingdom of mortal men called Israel ruled by the LORD God. This covenant was expanded over time to become Israel's constitution, by-laws, history and wisdom. The purpose of the Sinai Covenant was to create a society for mortal human beings that would encourage spiritual maturation towards the perfect love of God.

Sinai Covenant in Prophecy

In Jesus' future thousand year reign, the Sinai Covenant will be revived in modified form along with temple worship and animal sacrifice. It will be the rod of iron by which the immortal and resurrected Messiah will rule mortal nations of human beings, a civil law of the land based on spiritual truth and purpose.

Following the ancient principles of the Law of God, this covenant will once again be restated and adapted to incorporate society's social and technological advances (the status of women, electricity and modern appliances, for example). Any modifications of God's future civil government for man expressed in Law will be based on His original covenant promises and purposes.

The Sinai Covenant's purpose was to prepare the way for each individual member of that

ancient Israelite culture to enter into a New Covenant relationship with God. Prior to Jesus' life on earth, the righteous looked forward to His sacrifice. The believer today looks backward in history. From either perspective, it is by faith alone that sin is covered and the mind converted.

The Sinai Covenant is national and societal in scope: it deals with behavioral training techniques that lead men to being humbly honest with themselves in recognition of their sin and need for divine help. Until humility and repentance arrive for a person there is no place for faith. Humility is at its core an individual issue, not a societal one.

Therefore, the New Testament does not seek to change societies or national cultures, but individuals within a society, any society. It makes no difference if you are a circumcised Israelite or an uncircumcised Gentile. What is important is the birth of the Holy Spirit within you, which is a miracle of faith.

Although Jesus came approximately two thousand years ago, not everyone has faith in Him today. It will be so even in His future millennial rule from Jerusalem. The restored sacrifices will show that the end of sin is death for everyone who does not repent and personally believe the gospel of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection. The Sinai Covenant updated and modernized will have the same goal as the original one: humanity's salvation.

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore, the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:23-26)

The New Testament

The New is a Testament because it is empowered by the death of the Son of God, Jesus, as our Passover sacrifice. This creates the spiritual first fruits as related earlier. The New Testament is unmerited grace that is by nature spiritual and individual. It is a change in attitude and spirit by faith as opposed to behavioral works such as the social training of a nation as expressed in the Sinai Covenant.

In the New Testament Covenant expression, God's purpose is revealed in its fullness on an individual and personal basis. Each man or woman is joined through the Holy Spirit to the all other converted individuals creating the Church of God, the Bride of Christ. Those begotten of the Holy Spirit will be resurrected in spirit bodies, immortal, at Jesus' return to constitute the Kingdom of God. The Church also takes on the covenant name of the Messiah's Wife, Israel.

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So is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body...

Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Corinthians 15:42, 50)

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:15-16)

Chapter 9 - THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus was and is the Messenger of God's covenant with man. He is the promised Messiah of Israel, a nation which came into being by the codified implementation of the Abrahamic Covenant at Sinai. The gospels proclaim the Messiah's work as the Messenger, Husband and Enabler of God's eternal promise to man in His Body and Bride, the Church.

This is the Gospel of John's record regarding the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in Jerusalem:

And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated.

And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise." (John 2:13-16)

John did not open Jesus' public ministry with purging the temple in Jerusalem from moneychangers and merchants of sacrifice just to condemn hypocritical and avaricious religious leaders. There is a much deeper message which is introduced in the following verses.

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume Me." The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, seeing that You do these things?" (17-18)

Jesus' actions were not those of an ordinary man. Even non-believing Jews present at the time recognized Jesus' purification of the temple as a proclamation of Messiahship.

Jesus claimed the right to purge "His Father's house" so declaring God His Father. The actual amount of purification of the physical building was secondary in importance to the message it proclaimed because the temple of His body was itself housing the Holy Spirit of the Father.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it Up." The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken. (19-22)

The play on the Greek words is also revealing. The temple Jesus purged is the Greek *hieron*, which is a sacred, priestly edifice while the reference to the temple of His body is the Greek *naos*, which is the dwelling place or inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. (Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible)

Jesus purged the stone edifice of the moneychangers and merchandisers. These men sought material profit from trading in others' sincere spiritual service to God by selling over-priced religious-authorities-certified sacrificial animals and marked up coins permitted by temple authorities to be used as offerings. (i.e. Jewish coins without the image of Caesar or of some pagan god on them)

Jesus objected to the priests using the power of their religious monopoly to artificially inflate the price of a common person's obligations in fulfilling the Law. As mentioned above, the religious leaders were committed to material gain to the point that their traditions ignored the Law's purpose in order to increase the deposits in the temple treasury from which they were paid. (Matthew 15:1-9)

No Tithes for Jesus

Merchandising trade is the spiritual foundation of Babylon, the great false religious-economic-political system which deceives the world. Babylon reinterprets God's commands and truth for the purpose of physical expediency or survival. The presence of the attitudes or practices of Babylon, even in small amounts, will inevitably corrupt the worship of God to that of mammon. (Revelation 17 and 18.)

But the temple Jesus was going to raise up was the actual dwelling place of God the Father: His body. This is why the veil to the Holy of Holies (*naos* = temple) was torn open at His death in Luke 23:45.

Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice," you would not have condemned the innocent. (Matthew 12:6-7)

Curiously, Jesus declared Himself greater than the temple, but with His awareness of this superiority He does not command the people to pay Him any tithes due Him by virtue of His office. Jesus knew He was the Messiah and the Son of God. Who could possibly have had a

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better right to the tithes and offerings of the people? Who else could change the Law? But He didn't.

There is no mention in the gospels of Jesus asking for money. He did accept dinner invitations, gifts of loving labor, and by inference funds, but He never claimed the right to the Levites' tithe or the Aaronic Priests' offerings. He did not create a new tithe.

Jesus did support the practice of tithing to the Temple as will be shown below. From Hebrews 7:14 we know that He never claimed to be a priest of Levite, nor did His followers ever consider Him a Levite or qualified to receive the tithes of Israel. In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus states His position clearly: He did not change or reinterpret the Law to provide for His own material needs, unlike too many who claim to be His ministers.

Spiritual Sacrifices More Important

God is chiefly interested in spiritual sacrifices, not material ones. These are the sacrifices Jesus encouraged without discouraging the established system of animal offerings. The material gifts are only important in so far as they signify the spiritual heart of man. They are the works that testify of true faith. (James 2:17-26)

Jesus taught that God, His Father, was not interested in the material value of an offering or the glory of a building of gold and stone, but in true righteousness founded on loving mercy and total dedication. To illustrate how the attitude of the giver is more important than the amount given, Mark 12:41-44 records the following:

And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the multitude were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. And calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury, for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

This Jewish widow could have given only one coin, but she gave both of them - all her living. Jesus' point is that we must give all our being, all our life to God. He was not teaching that we should all go about penniless. He was teaching commitment to God's will and purpose.

Where would humanity be if Jesus had only given half of His life? What the Father asked of His only begotten Son, He also asks of all who would be His adopted sons - who would be born again:

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Romans 12:1)

Jesus the Messiah came to the earth in fulfillment of the prophecy in Malachi 3:1-6 as proclaimed by John the Baptist.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.'" (Mark 1:1-3)

"And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

Remember that the messenger is a purifying fire. Jesus as Messiah had a right to purify the temple He came to. In this case John's passage is recording a dual coming. When Jesus anciently came to the temple in Jerusalem, His presence all by itself delivered a spiritual message that revealed a deep truth about God's plan for humanity.

It was not only Jesus who came to that temple, but God the Father. He came in two ways: First, He came, through the Holy Spirit, in the body of Jesus. Secondly, Jesus' body, itself the dwelling place of God, brought that indwelling Holy Spirit to the building of stone in Jerusalem. The Bible records the first time the Holy Spirit came to the temple of stone in Jerusalem:

Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house, and the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD's house. (II Chronicles 7:1-2)

A temple is a structure or house where God dwells:

But the LORD is in His holy temple. (Habakkuk 2:20)

The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven. (Psalms 11:4)

This is why Jesus could say that He was greater than the temple: the Father was alive and active in Him because He was the Son of God as well as being the Son of Man. He was greater because through Jesus the Holy Spirit which dwelt in the temple and in Him would come to dwell in all men, thereby fulfilling the Promise.

He was the promised Son of David, the Messiah, the King of Israel and the future King of Kings. Jesus worked and spoke as He "saw" His Father work and "heard" His Father speak. (John 5:17-19, 30)

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Promises Extended to All Believers

Jesus' sacrificial death opened the Holy of Holies to all mankind. Just as the Father dwelt in Jesus through the Holy Spirit, now that same Spirit would dwell in all those who would repent and believe. This is what the Gospel of John goes on to discuss in chapter 3, right after publicly introducing Jesus to Jerusalem by purging the temple:

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. (16-19)

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands --

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:11-13)

Jesus does not purify to judge but to save. He came and gave His life that all men might be born of the Spirit just as He was the Spirit templed in flesh. His Father sent Him that all men might be adopted as His sons into His eternal Kingdom and inherit the promises made to Israel.

Purification of the Believer

But as the temple of His Holy Spirit, the believing Christian must be purified by Christ just as Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem by driving out the moneychangers. Our bodies must come under the rule of the will of God, accepted as our own, instead of the rule of the flesh which is caught in sin and death. This is done through the indwelling of His Spirit which also imparts eternal life.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to

live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption, as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:11-17)

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (I Corinthians 3:16-17)

Flee immorality. (*porneia* in Greek) Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:18-20)

Abraham was a type of the Father. The promise or covenant upon which the eternal lives of the saints are based was originally made to him, and so, in faith we become Abraham's sons as well. Abraham's covenant becomes new in that it is born within us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are joined to Christ the covenant of marriage:

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

Jesus closed His ministry by purging the temple again just prior to His crucifixion. This was symbolic of His prophesied second coming as well as proof of His continual concern and effort to purify the church as the temple of God, His own collective body of spirit born believers.

And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and seats of those who were selling doves.

And He said to them, "It is written, 'My House shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers den." (Matthew 21:12-13)

As each Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit, so the Church collectively is the temple of the Spirit. As the spiritual temple of God, the Church is cleansed by the Son, the Messiah and Savior of the Body in preparation for the wedding feast at His second coming.

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The Marriage Supper

The Church must be without sin, for God will not dwell in a temple polluted by merchandising nor will the Messiah claim as His Body a wife of Babylonian harlotry.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also in Christ. For Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. (I Corinthians 12:12-14)

And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (I Peter 2:4-5)

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:23, 25-27)

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" (Revelation 19:7-9)

As we have seen earlier in this book, when Jesus returns He will restore the physical temple in Jerusalem with animal sacrifices and the Levitical priesthood. Tithing will be restored to support that priesthood and building. This restoration of the temple is a monumental step in the restoration of all things. It also pictures or foreshadows God's ultimate goal; therefore, Jesus' primary work today is the building of the spiritual temple of His Body, the Church.

A vital part of that construction is the purification of the building materials. The Holy Spirit can only dwell in undefiled sanctuary. Therefore, judgment is continually on the house of God as it reaches towards perfection in faith. This process of purifying the Church is being intensified now as Jesus prepares to return. Once again He is driving the moneychangers out of His Father's house, the Church of God.

When Jesus comes again to His Bride, there will be a great marriage supper to celebrate the unity of all believers in the one Kingdom of God. This ultimate goal is prophesied in Revelation 21:22 where the Father, the only Begotten Son, and all the adopted-born sons of God - compose one spiritual temple, which is heaven on earth forever.

Jesus Supported by Offerings

While on the earth Jesus supported the payment of tithes to the Levitical priesthood. For His own work, Jesus accepted donations. He accepted them in the form of money, goods and/or services. The money was looked upon as being for Jesus and all of the disciples who traveled with Him: it was for their collective benefit and not just Jesus' money. This is attested by their reaction to Jesus' acceptance of the costly oil used to anoint His head and/or feet.

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it upon His head as He reclined at the table, but the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor."

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you have with you always; but you do not always have me. For when she poured this perfume upon my body, she did it to prepare Me for burial." (Matthew 26:6-12)

Mary therefore took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor (people)?" [This word is added by translators.]

Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.

Jesus therefore said, "Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have Me." (John 12:3-8)

Some scholars think that some of the references to the "poor" mentioned in the gospels actually are referring to wandering groups of religious teachers like Jesus and the disciples. They think it was the name used for the disciples other than the twelve. But there is no doubt that many of the references are to the impoverished and not the followers of Jesus.

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Nonetheless, the money Judas held was considered to belong to the entire group. This is evidenced by the disciples' reaction to how the money was spent. Judas had physical possession of the money box which meant that he kept Jesus' and the disciple's collective, as opposed to personal funds.

Out of that money box supplies were bought for their festival observances and other collective needs. This communal practice was continued in the first months of the Church's existence in Jerusalem where the saints had "all things in common." (Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-37)

For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast," or else, that he should give something to the poor. (John 13:29).

Festival expenses were supposed to be covered by the tithe, or "second" tithe according to some. Were the disciples tithing? If so, on what? They wandered about with no home, and no opportunity to seriously harvest produce. Only occasionally did they even fish. There is nothing in the Bible about tithing on fish caught. Since Jesus did not receive tithes, donations from the public are a probable source of these funds.

When He sent out the twelve and the seventy, Jesus sent them economically dependent on the support of the community they would serve. This was to teach a spiritual dependence on God who was the source of their power and would supply all their need. This was the instruction that stuck in the minds of the disciples when they began their own ministries in the name of Jesus. They remembered His example, as well, for that was a vital part their primary instruction. Jesus taught in word and in deed.

And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God, and to perform healing.

And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and take your leave from there. And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them."

And departing, they began going about among the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. (Luke 9:1-6)

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go

your ways; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." (Luke 10:1-3)

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Yet with all authority in heaven and earth, Jesus did not take tithes to Himself or command them to His disciples. Neither does He command them to His ministers today.

What was good enough for Him is good enough for His servants. (Compare John 15:20 and Philippians 1:1.) They are to be supported by freewill donations just as He was. It is miserably weak to claim that Jesus' example is not pertinent to this case because He was "under the Law" and the Christian is not. Grace does not make void the Law but establishes it. (Romans 3:31)

The New Testament is the same covenant that was confirmed at Sinai, given to Abraham. (Galatians 3:29) Therefore, Paul taught that the believer follows Jesus' example knowing that he shall be judged by Him according to it:

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (I Corinthians 11:1)

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps. (I Peter 2:21)

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son; even as they honor the Father. (John 5:22-23)

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Chapter 10 - TITHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

New Testament teachings on tithing and giving include the practical questions of life during the Herodian Temple era (the time of Jesus and the early church in Judea), and the those that refer to the theological exposition of the ideal New Testament teaching for Jew and Gentile everywhere. We need to look at both aspects to fully understand what the Bible commands us today.

The historical writings of the New Testament make references to tithing because a physical temple and Levitical priesthood was in operation while Jesus and the Apostles lived. It continued to be of central importance during the years of the church's existence prior to the First War with Rome in 66-70.

Before 66 AD, the Jewish Christians were a sect of Judaism. Afterwards a large rift appeared between those Jews who believed Jesus was the Messiah and those who did not. This division in the Jewish community was caused by the Shamai Pharisees' and Zealots' expulsion of the Christians from the synagogues as prophesied by Jesus in John 16:2. This policy of social and religious ostracism began while Jesus was mortal as recorded in John 9:22.

The worship of the Jewish community, including the Jewish Christians, (continued to be centered around the Temple ruins, possibly even including some sacrifices. Significant national hope for Temple restoration arose with the Bar Kochba led Jewish revolt against Roman occupation in 132-135 AD.

They lost, and the Roman Emperor Hadrian responded by sowing Jerusalem with salt, placing a pagan temple to Jupiter on the holy site and prohibiting the return of any Jew to Jerusalem after under penalty of death, whether he/she was Christian or not. He likewise prohibited the practice of all Jewish forms of worship including circumcision, observance of the Sabbath, study of the Torah, sacrificial offerings, and other Temple ritual.

Jesus on Tithing and Tradition

In His teaching, Jesus referred to the Law of Moses and not some "spiritual" or "universal" law. While He walked the earth, He obeyed and supported the God-commanded Mosaic Law and the established temple worship. Those who teach Christians to tithe to ministers have changed the Law contrary to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus therefore answered them, and said: "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the

teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him. Did not Moses give you the law? And yet none of you carries out the law." (John 7:16-19)

Jesus did not support the hypocrisy or every added tradition of the Jewish religionists of His day (primarily the Pharisees and the Sadducees). He came to fulfill and magnify the Law because aspects of it had become distorted by those who had seated themselves in Moses' office of authority. Their man-made doctrines and, customs went contrary to the original intent and letter of the Law of Moses. Here is what Jesus said in the Sermon of the Mount:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

The LORD was pleased for His righteousness sake to make the law great and glorious. (Isaiah 42:21)

The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" (Matthew 15:2)

Jesus answered, "And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ... And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'" (15:3-9)

As mentioned above, the tradition Jesus referred to had to do with money. Remember that the Pharisees and Sadducees taught that if money was given to the Temple, then the giver was morally exempt from using it to financially support his mother or father. This human interpretation of the Law could effectively pacify a Pharisee's conscience about accepting monetary gifts from poor people who really should have given the money to their parents. Jesus had a different opinion.

Jesus' comments on tithing in Matthew 23:23 are in the context of sharp criticism of the Pharisees' self-righteous legalism regarding money. Tithing to God does not excuse the neglect of me weightier matters

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of loving concern for our fellowman. Love of God is demonstrated by obedience to His entire Law in its intent and purpose which not only honors Him but also commands generosity and forgiveness to others. (I John 5:3)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.

Jesus on Taxation

Since tithing was ordained by the LORD God as Israel's divine and functioning King, it is not surprising that Jesus also commented on taxation by the human political powers of that time. His comments are instructive in four ways:

- 1) The Jewish people were technically exempt from paying Caesar's poll tax (supposedly used for support and protection of the Temple) because they were sons of God, the only legitimate King;
- 2) They were to pay the tax anyway in order to avoid offense;
- 3) They were supposed to do this even though the money was wrongfully used to support the Roman occupation;
- 4) This civil tax was paid in addition to the tithe. (See also Matthew 22:15-22.)

And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?"

And he said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?"

And upon his saying, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Consequently the sons are exempt.

"But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater (or, shekel, worth four drachmas). Take that and give it to them for you and Me." (Matthew 17:24-27)

After Jesus died and was resurrected, the church at Jerusalem was headed by the Apostle James, His brother. The early church in Judea observed both the Sinai and the New Covenants. Although they met in the homes of believers for prayer, study and sharing meals, the Nazarenes, as they were called, celebrated the Sabbath and the Feasts at the temple. (Acts 24:5) There were several reasons for this dual observance.

Undoubtedly, the Jerusalem and Judean churches shared Paul's conviction that Jesus would soon return to the Temple in Jerusalem. They were able to maintain this hope even after the Temple and Jerusalem had been profaned and destroyed as prophesied in Daniel and mentioned by Jesus in the Olivet Prophecy. (See Matthew 24:1-31, especially verse 15.)

This belief in an early return of Jesus is shown by the disciples' question of Jesus just prior to His ascension into heaven. They asked Him:

"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" He said, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." (Acts 1:6-7)

Also, Malachi's admonition was fresh in their minds and directly applicable. They remembered the Law of Moses and, from all indications, paid their tithes to the temple priesthood. (See Acts 21:17-26.)

You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law. (Acts 21:20)

Early Church Practices

A number of the priests and Pharisees believed that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 6:7; 15:5) The Judean churches were living near the Temple, and their observance of both Sinai Covenant (the Law), and the New Testament was in anticipation of the (what we know now will be a future) restoration of Israel and the Temple service in Jerusalem when Jesus returned as promised.

There was no sin in this dual observance because both are really just expansions upon the One Covenant of God with Abraham. The New Testament was the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that God's Covenant would be placed in the hearts of men.

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

"And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

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The Jerusalem church set the example for the rest of the churches. Even though they kept the temple obligations themselves as circumcised Israelites, the Jerusalem elders did not require the Gentiles to be bound to the Sinai Covenant. They recognized that becoming a naturalized Israelite through circumcision and keeping the ritual provisions of the Law were not required for salvation since Jesus' death and resurrection. We are Abraham's children by faith and not by genealogy. (See Acts 15:19-29.)

As Jeremiah had prophesied, the covenant was integrated into the hearts of men through the converting power of the Holy Spirit. It was no longer just a matter of external observance. Therefore, the spiritual teachings of the Law were followed by the Gentile churches after the traditions set by the Judean churches wherever they did not specifically relate to the Temple service and sacrifices.

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews. (I Thessalonians 2:14)

The above reference to "Jews" is to those Jews who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, but many Jews did. The early believers were considered a sect of Judaism called Nazarenes, just as there were Essenes, Pharisees, Herodians, and Zealots. Each of these religious sects also functioned with limited self-governing political powers and could be referred to as a "party."

Remember also that the only Bible available to anyone was what is now called the Old Testament, then called the Law of Moses. It was the only Scripture. The "New Testament" books and letters were collected and approved by orthodox Christian bishops over a lengthy period of time, many years after the deaths of the Apostles and the New Testament authors.

For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath. (Acts 15:21)

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16)

The Roman Diaspora

Outside of Palestine, there were anywhere from three to six million Jews dispersed among a total Roman Empire population of from fifty to sixty million people. Jewish religious communities built around synagogues were well established in most cities. Many of them had been actively proselytizing converts from their non-Israelite, Hellenistic

neighbors. These factors contributed to open assembly where the Law was read and religious ideas about it discussed. It is no wonder that Christianity initially spread throughout the Empire in cities, following the pattern of the Jewish dispersion and settlement.

Both Gentile and Jewish Christians followed the same calendar. Of course, there were a few differences in how the holy days were observed. There was an obvious difference in liturgy due to differences in language and culture. The Passover is one example of those differences.

Bible book scrolls were very rare and valuable, so to hear the Word of God, Christians first went to the synagogues. The joint attendance of Christians and Jews at the synagogue was not a problem (until made one by Jewish radical extremists) because the "Nazarenes" were considered a sect of Judaism and observed the same Sabbath and Feast days.

Passover and Easter

Passover was observed by both Jews and Christians on the same day and time, the early night beginning Nisan 15, but each sect observed it with different symbols. The symbols of the New Testament covenant meal were taken from the Lord's Supper. Early Christians took unleavened bread and wine, to represent the body and blood of Jesus as the Messiah and true Passover Lamb. This covenant meal will be observed once again with Christ in the Kingdom (Matthew 26:29). (See also my book, **Passover: The Covenant Meal.**)

As a result of later Jewish and Roman persecution of Christians, the observance of Easter and Sunday developed in western, Gentile churches during the second century AD - over 100 years after the birth of the Church. For hundreds of years the Jewish, or Quartodeciman Passover, was widely practiced by Gentile and Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire before Easter Sunday was enjoined by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

According to the New Testament, the Nazarenes or Christians outside of Judea observed the same Holy Days and rituals as the church in Jerusalem observed - with an obvious exception. They did not observe the ritual laws applying to the temple service such as tithing and sacrificial offerings, but neither did the Jews who lived outside of Palestine!

Passover and Circumcision

Thus, it becomes obvious why the Council in Jerusalem focused on circumcision as the pre-requisite to take the New Testament Passover. (Acts 15) Circumcision was the main, non-temple ritual practiced by the dispersed, or Diaspora Jews that was not followed by the Gentile Christians. Jesus

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had taught the necessity of eating the Passover meal in John 6:53-57.

And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1 - read the whole chapter.)

Physical circumcision of the male was the sign of membership or citizenship in the mortal nation of Israel. It was the sign of the Sinai Covenant. It was required of any Israelite or "stranger" who wanted to take the Passover. (Exodus 12:42-50)

Previously, circumcision was the sign of the original covenant of promise made by the LORD with Abraham. Spiritual circumcision of the heart is the sign of the New Testament as evidenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit joined to the heart or mind of the believer.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

On the Day of Pentecost and during the first days of the church, all those baptized were Jews who had been circumcised. God later revealed that Gentiles could be baptized without being circumcised by giving His Holy Spirit to the Roman Cornelius and his Gentile household prior to baptism. (See Acts 10:1-11:18, especially 10:34-48.) In other words, salvation was opened to all mankind, no longer just for physical Israel.

A person desiring to serve and obey God as a Christian did not need to be circumcised first. Circumcision was the sign of membership in the Jewish community. That community came under the authority and traditions of the Sanhedrin, which did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. The receiving of the Holy Spirit clearly took precedence for Christians as a sign of their community under Jesus.

The conclusion of the Acts 15 conference makes a lot more sense from this perspective. The non-Jewish Christians were not required to be circumcised in order to take the Passover. They did not need to become physical Israelites in order to become spiritual ones - the church. (Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:16)

Membership in spiritual Israel was symbolized with baptism and the internalization of eternal life. Since they were not bound to temple ritual and custom, they were not obligated to pay any tithes in support of the Temple either. The ritual worship systems go in sets, and tithing belongs with the mortal - material set of Levitical Priests and a temple of stone.

The Gentile Christians were not required to support temple sacrifices and its priests since they had Jesus as their sacrifice, neither did they tithe to the apostles or to the Jerusalem church. Instead, the Gentile churches were encouraged to provide gifts of food for the needy saints:

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)

James concluded, "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood." (Acts 15:19-20)

Fellowship Meals

Three of these four restrictions placed on Gentile believers concerned the eating of meat and thus implicitly the social relationship between Gentile and Jewish Christians when sharing meals.

Observance of James' summary conclusions made it possible for Jews and Gentiles to share the same food in contrast to the Pharisaic traditions which prohibited Jews from eating at the same table with Gentiles. (Galatians 2:11-15) This consideration was particularly important in regards to the Passover feast that traditionally accompanied the New Testament ritual meal.

This festival context clarifies Paul's discussion of the "meats" regulations in connection with the Christian Passover feast in I Corinthians 8 and 10:14-33. Remember that anciently most meat eaten by any man, Jew or Gentile, was sacrificed to a deity. Most of the meat in Gentile cities was sacrificed to a local pagan deity and sold in the pagan temples. The decision of Acts 15 is based on the assumption that the meat eaten is not sacrificed to any deity: the true God or a demon idol.

In short Christians, Jewish or Gentile, do not need to offer sacrifice because Jesus is "the" sacrifice as far as eternal life is concerned. Meat could be consumed by believers legally without having to be sacrificed to God as long as it wasn't strangled or full of blood. But it had to be the kind of meat that was acceptable to God for sacrifice. The fourth point, abstention from fornication, was also connected with idolatrous temple worship.

One of the immediate benefits of this freedom was that neither Jewish nor Gentile Christians had to buy kosher meat from Jewish suppliers. This narrow

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obligation is what was done away. The only meat eaten by observant Jews was ritually slaughtered by specially trained and sanctioned Jewish butchers blessed by a Jewish rabbi.

These legal technicalities and long established customs were in a state of change then and not easily understood. This is why so much space is taken by the subject of meats in Paul's letters.

No New Testament Tithing

Since the New Testament is the covenant that constitutes the Kingdom of God composed of spiritually resurrected saints - who themselves are the spiritual temple of God, it is logical that tithing is not explicitly commanded or even implied. There is no need for it. Why should and how could immortal priests, who are the spiritual temple, pay tithes to each other?

For the sake of discussion, let's assume that the Christian ministry has replaced the Levitical priesthood. If ministers as agents of Jesus, our high priest after the order of Melchizedek, were analogous to the Levitical priests or Aaronites, then the church members would be analogous to the Levites. (Hebrews 3:1)

The church, then, would be the first born or first fruits of the world just as the Levites were substituted for the first born sons of the other tribes of Israel. (James 1:17-18) Therefore, the nation of Israel itself would in turn symbolize all nations in this discussion analogy. (Compare Romans 11:26 and I Timothy 2:4.)

Following this analogy, the world should tithe to the church. The world, not the believer, should provide the church a share of its inheritance. Then the church would in turn offer a ten percent offering to the ministers from the tithes. Thus, church members receive offerings from non-Christians in the world.

Obviously, the analogy breaks down in strict application to the situation today. First, the mission of the Church is to grow to include all the earth's peoples. Second, it simply is not practical to expect the unconverted world to support the church.

The ruling priesthood of the Kingdom of God is the Melchizedek priesthood with Jesus as its High Priest. It is immortal and in no need of physical sustenance. The Temple in heaven is a spiritual structure which is the only setting for spiritual sacrifices.

The tithe was food to be eaten, produce given to be the Levites' right of inheritance. It provided life support to mortal administrators of a theocratic kingdom ruled by a spiritual King. By its very definition, the tithe was never, could never, and shall never be, an offering - much less a spiritual offering.

At the altar in heaven, spiritual sacrifices are offered - not edible food. These sacrifices are offerings, not tithes, since they are given to an immortal high priest, Jesus the Messiah. Spiritual sacrifices are always 100% - not ten per cent. Christ gave all His life, and we are to give all of ours. Where would we be - or Jesus, for that matter, if He had given only ten per cent?

The one traditional use of the Levitical tithe that was enjoined on the early church in the Diaspora was to remember the poor in Jerusalem. This reminder would have been unnecessary if tithes were regularly collected in the local churches, for then a portion could have been sent to Jerusalem by the local elders without Paul having to specifically appeal to the membership.

That Paul had to remind the Gentile churches to remember the poor in Jerusalem is proof that tithes were not regularly collected in the local churches. That a special effort was made to take the collection for the poor to Jerusalem is proof that neither tithe, nor a "tithe of a tithe," nor even offerings, were regularly sent to the Jerusalem headquarters church.

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Chapter 11 – THE MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD

Now it is possible to address one of the most frequently quoted sections of Scripture used to prove that Christians must tithe to their minister and/or church.

Although Jesus upheld the Law and did not change it, many Christian teachers who claim to be His disciples and ministers have in effect changed the tithing and other Biblical laws. These changes are almost always accompanied by some kind of scriptural justification. For tithing, they often focus on Hebrews 7:12 to establish New Testament authority for Christian ministers to collect tithes from church members. Here is that critical verse:

For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law, also.

Their simple claim is that today's preachers of Jesus Christ constitute a priesthood superior to the Levitical priesthood. This superiority is based on Jesus' superior credentials as an eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek as compared to the mortal high priests of Aaron's lineage. They contend that this change provides for the tithes to go to the ministry instead of to the Levites and Aaronites; therefore, Christians must now tithe to a minister or church of Jesus Christ.

Do Ministers Function as Priests?

The advocates of tithing usually consider it to be an eternal principle or law of God. They believe that tithing was practiced by the patriarchs, expanded on for the Levites, and changed to apply to the church. According to this approach anyone who claims Jesus as Savior and doesn't tithe is sinning and may risk eternal punishment and/or God's disfavor.

Inherent in this understanding is the treatment of a Christian minister as a priest and the false assumption that priests receive tithes.

The phrase "change of law" is interpreted to mean that tithes go to Christian ministers instead of Jewish rabbis (today's priests) and synagogue (temple). Since Jesus is now the high priest of the Melchizedek order, His ministers are lesser priests of the same order, qualified to receive the tithes in the name of Jesus. They overlook the fact that the tithe never went to the Aaronite priests but to the non-priestly Levites. All Aaronites were Levites, but not all Levites were Aaronites.

Even if the Melchizedek priesthood has supplanted the Levitical priesthood in the rights to receive tithes, and if Christian ministers were functioning as priests in the place or on behalf of Jesus, they still would not receive tithes. Priests never received

tithes - only offerings. The sons of Aaron received the gifts of the altar of the temple of stone in Jerusalem because the LORD was their inheritance. The Levites received the tithes because their inheritance right to a portion of the Promised Land was replaced by the right to receive a tithe of land's agricultural production as their inheritance.

The Levites symbolize all believers. Just as all Aaronites are Levites, so all ministers are Christians. Furthermore, Jesus is high priest of both layman and minister. Today, God is the inheritance of all Christians. We, both minister and layman, are all equal heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. As heirs of God, we will inherit the Kingdom of God just as Jesus did by the resurrection from the dead. All Christians are His brothers, sons of the same Father. (Hebrews 2:9-18)

All Christians will be priests after the order of Melchizedek upon attaining immortality through the resurrection from the dead, not just ministers. Therefore, all the church - not just the ordained elders - have a right to receive the immortal inheritance and not a substitute or alternative inheritance. The only alternative to immortality is death. The alternative to a province in the land of Canaan become Israel was the tithe of that entire land's production.

Jesus receives mankind's spiritual gifts and sacrifices offered at the altar in heaven. No human minister serves at that altar. He is the only mediator.

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

If ministers claim to be qualified to receive tithes, then it follows that they must consciously or unconsciously consider themselves to be, or in effect function as, priests. This thought relegates lay members to a lesser state as non-priests or sub-Christians. Priests are mediators between God and man. Today, the exercise of any priestly role functionally usurps Jesus' position as the Head of the Church, His temple.

Remember, it was unacceptable for an Israelite to offer sacrifice himself: he had to take it to God's priest at the one, central altar. There the priest would examine the offering, accept qualified sacrifices on God's behalf, sanctify them, slaughter and cut the animal carcasses, lay the meat on the altar to be roasted in pan and finally burn it up in part or in full by fire - depending on the type of sacrifice required. That is what mediation is all about.

The Christian cannot require mediation by another human being because no one other than Jesus has ever been or ever will be qualified to offer the necessary spiritual sacrifice of a sinless life. It is

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through Jesus' sacrifice that the Christian offers his own life as his reasonable service. Through Christ, we can approach the altar in heaven before the throne of the Father. The humbled believer is required to confess sins to God and Christ alone.

Jesus is the only mediator because He is the only priest of the New Testament that now exists. The fact that He is the high priest does not signify that lesser priests of Melchizedek presently exist in office, fulfilling their priestly functions as earthly, sand-in mediators for Jesus, the ultimate mediator. Christians receive the Holy Spirit through Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes through no other mediator, spiritual or mortal. (Acts 4:12)

The change of law mentioned in verse 12 refers to the entire priesthood system, which only indirectly includes tithing. Subsequent chapters in Hebrews discuss the relationship between the Sinai or Old Covenant and the New Testament - the earthly temple and the heavenly one (Hebrews 8:2,5; 9:23-28). Though a full discussion is beyond this book, a review of a few of the important points will help to put this section of scripture into context, and how it relates to tithing.

Jesus, High Priest and Son of God

Today, Jesus is the only resurrected Son of God as well as the only begotten Son of God. He was begotten and not created as were the angels.

For to which of the angels did He ever say, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee?" And again, "I will be a Father to Him, and He shall be a Son to Me?" (Hebrews 1:5)

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. (Hebrews 3:1)

And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him,

"Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee," just as He says also in another passage, "Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (Hebrews 5:4-6).

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham as he was returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham apportioned a tenth part of all the spoils, was first of all, by the translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, which is king of peace.

Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually. (Hebrews 7:1-3)

Thus, a Melchizedek priest is immortal. Inherent immortality is required to be a member of this priestly order, which eliminates all mortal men and women. Being "born again" is only the earnest of future membership. (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5)

This is the subject of Hebrews chapter 7. The author validates the use of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 as a type of an immortal priesthood because there is no biblical record of that person's mother or father or children. Some scholars propose an identity for him such as Shem, but any identity correlation with a particular mortal person is replaced by the Bible's symbolic treatment and emphasis on his office.

Melchizedek had no recorded birth or death. He had no genealogical qualifications to be a priest; yet he received tithe offerings (10% of spoils) in the name of the Eternal God and Messiah. Altogether there is a timelessness of symbolic eternity in the biblical story about this priest just as Jesus is now immortal.

According to the Levitical system, both parents had to be descendants of Aaron for a man to be qualified to be a priest. Consequently, the Bible is full of elaborate genealogies. (Read also Ezra 2:40-63; 8:15-20; 9:1-10:44.)

Melchizedek is the only priest of God mentioned in the Bible who was not a Levitical priest. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a priest of Midian. He was not a priest of God or of Israel. Jethro honored the LORD as the God of Israel and of Moses, his son-in-law, but not as his own - the ONE and Only God.

Jethro served his people, Midian, in sacrificing to their traditional gods. He also respected the gods of their friendly neighbors. This inclusive approach was the standard attitude of all religions in the ancient Near East, except for the religion of Israel. Israel's LORD said that He was the ONE, exclusive God and the Only.

For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords,

yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. (I Corinthians 8:5-6)

Contrast that necessary attitude of a true believer in the LORD with Jethro's polytheistic statement in Exodus 18:11:

Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; indeed, it was proven when they dealt proudly against the people.

Because Melchizedek was the only non-Levitical priest of the LORD in the Bible, the writer of Hebrews was able to use him in this discussion about a change in the priesthood. Whether he was

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an actual mortal man or some divine representative of God is irrelevant to the interpretation of Hebrews 7. He is a type of the eternal high priest just as David is a type of the Messiah king.

The point of this section of Scripture is the superiority of an eternal priesthood based on spiritual qualifications instead of a moral-material priesthood primarily qualified by genealogy and ritual (physical behavior with spiritual significance) purity.

The Change in the Law

Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham.

But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them, collected a tenth from Abraham, and blessed the one who had the promises. But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. And in this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (For on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. (Hebrews 7:4-12)

Earlier, we discussed how there is no evidence that Abraham paid tithes on a regular basis, or even once on his flocks and produce. The priest called Melchizedek was one who in type represented the true Melchizedek to come, Jesus.

Abraham gave a thank offering to this priest in honor of God and in faith, as proved by the fact that this tithe, like the tithe of tithe offering, was ten per cent of the choicest spoils. The figure of 10% was the common customs tax charged in the Ancient Near East. Offerings were always the choicest, or ritually unacceptable. The Sinai Covenant (Torah Teaching Law) tithe was made up of one-in-ten, which would be a chance mixture of qualities from choice to poor.

The whole discussion in Hebrews 7 revolves around the fact that Jesus was a Jew descended from King David physically and not a son of Aaron. He had no genealogical claim to being a priest, much less a high priest. Hebrew

& presents the rational argument that His credentials are higher, better and eternal, which means that His priesthood of the New Covenant takes precedence over the Levitical Aaronic priesthood administrative system of the Sinai Covenant.

The subject of the chapter is Jesus' qualifications as the Melchizedek Order High Priest - not tithing. The Melchizedek priesthood does not abolish or replace the Levitical priesthood. That idea is ludicrous! The Melchizedek priesthood serves at a different altar in a different temple: it serves the altar in the heavenly temple being built out of "spiritual stones."

The New Testament Melchizedek priesthood is the spiritual fulfillment of the LORD's Promise to Abraham. If the Levitical priesthood had been done away, the book of Hebrews would not have been necessary. Hebrews presents the spiritual superiority of the New Testament placed in the hearts of men through the mediation of a superior high priest of an immortal priesthood.

Though superior in delivering better (eternal) promises, the Melchizedek exists in parallel to the mortal priesthood of Levites and Aaronites created by Sinai Covenant of behavioral law mediated by angels, who served at an altar of bloody animal sacrifices in a temple built of limestone and marble. It has different responsibilities reflecting a spiritual inheritance instead of the Israelite's Promised Land.

Jesus' qualifications as a high priest had to be established apart from those given in the Torah for the sons of Aaron.

Scripture speaks of the Levitical priesthood's qualifications in detail. The Bible does not speak of the Melchizedek priesthood and its qualifications except in symbolic mystery revealed by the coming of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' mortal flesh as Israel's Messiah Husband. But in the flesh, Jesus did not qualify to be a priest: He was a Jew. (Remember, the only Scripture available for early Christians was what is now called the Old Testament.)

Jesus did not qualify as a priest according to the Law. He superseded Levitical qualifications by His resurrection to immortal life thereby revealing the qualifications for a priest of Melchizedek - perfectly righteous immortality.

Subsequent verses and chapters show that there is no need for animal sacrifices in order to be saved because of Jesus' eternal sacrifice. Similarly, there is no need for temple services administered by mortal priests and Levites to attain eternal salvation. Grain and meat offerings have no use as food for an immortal priest. He has no need to eat.

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle;

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And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. (Isaiah 1:11)

I shall take no young bull out of your house
Nor male goats out of your folds.
For every beast of the forest is Mine.
The cattle on a thousand hills.

I know every bird of the mountains,
And everything that moves in the field is Mine.

If I were hungry I would not tell you,
For the world is Mine, and all it contains.

Shall I eat the flesh of bulls
Or drink the blood of male goats?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
And pay your vows to the Most High;

Call upon Me in the day of trouble:
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.
(Psalms 50:9-15)

A spiritual priesthood needs spiritual sacrifices and offerings. Since Christians are not under the obligations of the Sinai Covenant, neither are they subject to tithing in support of a redundant temple service.

If there is any law change in regards to tithing. The recipients of the tithe do not change. The Levites possess the eternal right to any tithes paid by Israelites on the agricultural production of the land of promise. As long as and whenever there is an earthly temple in Jerusalem, there is and will be a Levitical priesthood (composed of Aaronic priests and Levitical ministers) to service that temple.

Israel is eternally obligated to tithe to the substitute first born sons of service - the Levites, as well as to celebrate the feasts, support the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. Israel is eternally obligated to offer sacrifices to materially support the priesthood - even after a future national acceptance that animal sacrifices do not spiritually cover sin since they are superseded by Jesus' bodily sacrifice.

Ministers Have No Rights to Tithes

Nowhere does it say that ministers are now to receive the tithe instead of the Levites. Nowhere does God say that He is the preacher's inheritance. The pastor is not the first fruit from the world: the entire church is. What is true for the pastor is true for the church when it comes to tithing. Both are to offer in service what God gifts them through His Holy Spirit.

An elder is due wages for time spent in God's service. The compensation he receives should be relative to the quality of his service. But Paul justifies this payment of wages by referring to a

beast treading out grain rather than to the Levitical right to the tithe of Israel.

Jesus is high priest after the order of Melchizedek on the basis of the power of the resurrection to eternal life and not on that of His tribal affiliation.

Can the same be said of any mortal minister or priest? No! Only Jesus

...has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. (16)

For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of the former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. (18-19)

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy innocent, undefiled, separated from the sinners and exalted above the heavens, who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. (26-27)

What change is there in the Law?

For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever. Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God. (7:28 - 8:5)

I don't think there is anything more plain than the Bible itself. The central subject of Hebrews 7 is not tithing. It's the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood over the Levitical priesthood. It is about the qualifications of Jesus Christ to be the high priest of that priesthood.

The example of tithing is only used to symbolically support the superiority of an immortal priesthood over a physical one. The change discussed was in the qualifications for this superior priesthood and its eternal high priest. To be a priest of Melchizedek, one must be resurrected to external life. There are no physical qualifications to be a Melchizedek priest such as the genealogical ones that exist for Levitical priests. There are only spiritual ones.

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To conclude that Christian ministers have a right to Levitical tithes because they are representatives of the superior priesthood of Christ is a wresting of scripture.

Priests never received tithes, only offerings. Furthermore, the Melchizedek priesthood is an eternal priesthood composed solely of resurrected Sons of God, of which there is only one now, Jesus. Certainly, no sane person would claim today that he is immortal, possessing a body of spirit maternal and not one of flesh!

God says that His ministers have a right to compensation and support because of their labor on behalf of the Kingdom of God - not because they are innately superior or of a different class than the rest of the Body of Christ. (Selections below only, read all of I Corinthians 9.)

Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things?

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING " God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?

If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. (7-14)

The book of Hebrews announces the existence of a new priesthood: the Melchizedek priesthood. It is an immortal priesthood made up of the resurrected saints. Because it is a priesthood of immortal Sons of God, it is superior to and in addition to the Levitical priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood alone serves at an earthly Temple of the God of Israel in Jerusalem. That earthly service of animal sacrifices is lawfully supported by tithes and offerings of circumcised Israelites according to the Law of the Sinai Covenant. The Levitical service on earth is a type of the coming spiritual service in the New Jerusalem

which has already begun in heaven with Jesus as its high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

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Chapter 12 - THE ETERNAL POOR

In early 1989 the Associated Press reported on a Pennsylvania man, a former minister, who had been unemployed for some time. He and his family had not eaten for months despite the fact that they had about \$3,500 in personal bank accounts. Why didn't they use it?

Because it was "God's tithe money." Since "it did not belong to them," they were afraid to spend it for survival. How "God's money" was still in their bank account must be another story.

These people were poor, yet they would not touch "God's tithe." They did not understand that one of the main purposes of the tithe was to feed the poor. Even advocates of tithing must agree that this family was lacking in Biblical understanding.

A teenage son died because of this error in attempted obedience. Although he was old enough to walk out of that house and get help, he did not. He had agreed to trust God and starve rather than use the family's saved "tithes for God." This is just a dramatic and modern case of an age old problem.

The Jerusalem Council

Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 records the first formal meeting of all the apostles and major church elders over a doctrinal issue. That issue was whether Gentile needed to be circumcised as well as being baptized. In essence, this meeting established the priority of the New Testament over the Sinai Covenant. James, the elder who made the final decisions, also gave direction and clarified some specific rules for Gentile believers to facilitate the fellowship of mixed congregations.

One of the consequences of this conference was the commitment by the evangelists working in areas outside of Judea to remember the poor saints who lived there – particularly those in Jerusalem. There was no commandment to send tithes to Jerusalem, nor is tithing mentioned one way or another.

Apparently, the request to remember the poor was not discussed as part of the main agenda as it is not included in the letter sent out to the churches in the Diaspora. First the official letter from Jerusalem:

Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas-- Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them,

"The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

"Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

"that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

So when they were sent away, they went down to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.

Paul mentions his promise to send food aid to the poor in Judea and Jerusalem in his own letters:

They only asked us to remember the poor the very thing I also was eager to do. (Galatians 2:10)

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem. (I Corinthians 16:1-3)

...I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Yes, they are pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things.

Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go. (Romans 15:25-28)

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Church Members to Give Offerings, Not Tithes

Regardless of how or when exactly it came about, Paul specifically encouraged the Gentile churches to support the poor in Jerusalem. It was a freewill donation, or he wouldn't have spent the amount of space in his letters that he did to raise money.

In his letters Paul makes absolutely no reference to tithing or to scriptures that implied tithing. He uses reason and appeals to generosity and fairness. The churches responded, and Paul led a delegation of local members to bring the needed gifts to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

The scriptures quoted above all relate to the collection of food or fruit, for the poor saints at Jerusalem. That church apparently had more poor than could be adequately supported by its members. Acts 6 also refers to this fact of life in the Jerusalem church. There were many people, widows mostly, who were dependent on the church.

These same verses are often used to justify the taking up of tithes, offerings or collections at weekly church services. But they do not support that practice. First of all, the references are to harvesting food, or perhaps money to buy food. "Laying aside" was probably a good bit of work, like preserving it for transport to Jerusalem. This was a real labor of love and it was all done at home - not at church.

Furthermore, the collection was for taking care of the humanitarian needs of the poor. It was not for the ministers, elders or for the furtherance of the gospel. God has always taken responsibility for His poor. All Israelites were His covenant people. The widow, the orphan and the dispossessed were entitled to some support from the Promised Land inheritance as a witness to God's goodness.

This care for the poor was one of the prime purposes for the tithe, and this Godly concern was later taught to the New Testament churches on its own merit outside of the context of tithing. No commands to tithe are made in the New Testament, but requests and exhortations were made to remember the poor. Hand in hand with the brotherly care for the Church's poor was the total dedication to advancing the gospel.

That the Gentiles received spiritual truth from the Jews is simply part of a persuasive encouragement to give. God is merciful and generous. This is an attribute of the mind of God that we are to make a part of our own.

Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them

for the needy and for the stranger, I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Do not take usurious interest from him, but revere your God, that your countryman may live with you. You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. (Leviticus 25:35-38)

He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:18-19)

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. (Jeremiah 7:5-7)

Forgiveness of Debt and the Poor

The following is a reference to the seventh or sabbatical year of release in Deuteronomy 15. I suggest you read the whole chapter. In the year of release, all existing personal debts were forgiven. They did not have to be repaid regardless of whether they were incurred six years or six days prior to the sabbatical year's beginning.

The principle of the year of release is found in United States Bankruptcy Code in modified form. Assuming basic honesty, both the Bankruptcy Code and the Year of Release are important legal concepts which minimize the number of poor as well as the severity of their poverty.

Deuteronomy 15:4 and 15:11:

There shall be no poor among you, since the LORD will surely bless you.

For the poor will never cease to be in the land.

These verses seem to contradict one another. Resolution is found in the fact that God is not a slot machine: He does not bless without purpose. God's blessings of material wealth are always found in conjunction with obedience to His laws of love.

Because of His covenant, God is involved in the lives of the Israelites of faith. He has committed Himself to help them prosper, but prosperity or wealth can also come by chance and/or the hard work of someone apart from divine intervention. On the other hand, if you choose to shut God out of your

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life, then you have chosen to reject the personal blessings He commands. You have turned down an invitation to God's insurance that nothing but your ultimate good will happen to you.

Do Not Borrow

God prefers His people to lend and not to borrow, for that is the key to freedom. If a nation obeys, then there are no poor. But people have never obeyed, so there have always been poor. Poverty and debt are curses to teach lessons of spiritual righteousness. These lessons are for nations and for persons.

If only you listen obediently to the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all this commandment

And you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. (Deuteronomy 15:5-6)

Those curses may be incurred by either personal or collective violations of God's principles. That is, your personal finances are significantly influenced by the policies and practices of your nation, state and county, as well as by your spending habits.

The Eternal Poor

However, in the end how you deal with the conditions of your life and society is your own responsibility. You can't totally blame others or factors beyond your control. God promises to intervene on the personal level if you put Him first in your life. Whatever our financial condition, God encourages generosity and kindness:

If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

Beware, lest there is a base thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of remission is near," and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you given him nothing; then he may cry to the LORD against you, and it will be a sin in you.

You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings.

For the poor will never cease to be in the land; therefore, I command you, saying, "You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land." (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

Cursed is he who distorts justice due an alien, orphan, and widow. (Deuteronomy 27:19)

Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1: 17)

Laziness Condemned

In His care for the poor God condemns laziness throughout the Bible, particularly in the book of Proverbs. The New Testament matches its concern and sympathy for the disadvantaged with serious exhortations to work. God has no sympathy for those who waste their lives and others' lives.

The New Testament advises some practical policies to protect the generous and to promote a giving attitude:

And let our people also learn to engage in good deeds [margin, occupations] to meet pressing needs, that they may not be unfruitful. (Titus 3:14)

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example.

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. (II Thessalonians 3:7-12)

In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (I Timothy 6:17-19)

But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (I John 3:17-18)

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, visit orphans and widows in their

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distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27)

Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

"For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me."

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?"

And the King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did to Me."

Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me." (Matthew 25:31-43)

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.

And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:7-10)

Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your return of measure it will be measured to you in return. (Luke 6:38)

God or Slot Machine Mammon?

God is rather plain that greed is sin. He is the source of all abundance. Wealth is a test of whether we will serve God or mammon. I will discuss that later. At this point I want you to note that these scriptures about generosity refer to the poor, needy and disadvantaged. They do not refer to the ministry or to the habitually indigent human parasites.

Many sincere ministers will use these verses to encourage you to give to their ministries. Many of verses do command and exhort Christians to provide for the needs of the gospel and its ministers, but the above verses are focused on generosity towards our fellow man.

It is spiritually more challenging to be generous to our neighbor than it is to give to the gospel because of the human tendency to be judgmental of those in need. It is too easy to become hardened by this world of woe. We develop the habit of instant rejection, or token gift to keep from pondering another's situation or getting involved with a disadvantaged person and really loving him or her.

There may be social barriers, too. The poor who confront us might be of a different race, class, or nationality. We may presumptuously judge them based on appearances and decide they are loafers, thieves, con men, alcoholics or drug users. Done consciously or out of habit, we thereby excuse ourselves from getting involved: we give neither of our money nor of our time.

Remember the Law of Moses. God gives the power to get wealth to establish His Covenant. God does not give the wealth; He gives the power to work and earn it.

God is not a slot machine or a wealth-by-chance lottery. Wealth is a tool, like health or intelligence. How we use what He gives us is the basis of His judgment. To whom much is given, much is required. Our goal is growth towards perfection as the Father is perfect.

Remember, too, that in all this volume of quotes, there is not one reference to tithing. In fact, the entire New Testament is rather silent on the matter. Why? I think it's obvious: the New Testament church did not tithe in biblical times.

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Chapter 13 - DONATIONS AND CHURCH FINANCE

Many have an intuition that tithing does not seem to fit the New Testament church. So far, I have given firm substantiation for that feeling. But it is also true that it does take money to do the works of the Lord today. The Bible teaches the principle of financial support for the ministry and the works of the church by all believers.

Generosity Commended

God does reward the generous giver, and He is faithful to those who trust in Him according to knowledge. It is the Bible that reveals God's will or mind on the matter, and it is the Bible that is misunderstood and misused in the support of ungodly practices in the name of Jesus. It is the Bible, general education and my professional training in the archaeology and history of Israel that provide the source material for this book. I have not read extensively into other theologians' writings.

Yes, the Bible does command and encourage us to give to His ministers. They are His soldiers and servants, and they have a right to earn their living from the gospel and to even prosper and be in abundance as the rest of the members of the body of Christ. But there is no legal, obligatory tithe of ten per cent: the Christian does not sin by not tithing.

Today, God is building a spiritual temple. He accepts offerings joyfully given of free will to help accomplish that work. The tithe was never an offering to priests or to God, but the distribution of the physical inheritance, Canaan's agricultural production, to the Levites as their rightful portion of the Promised Land.

When God directed the construction of the original tabernacle and its implements He used freewill offerings and not tithes:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. And this is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver, and bronze.

And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. (Exodus 25:1-8)

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household. having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being

built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

God's primary objective at this time is to build His Church. Thus, the attitudes of the co-builders, who are also the building, are more important to Him than any material donation or sacrifice. As we have seen from this entire study, God's concern is for the welfare of man, whether it be his or her eternal welfare or the condition of the back or belly.

It Does Take Money

It does take money to preach the gospel, provide facilities for schools and services, and to feed, clothe, and house the ministry. Our overall objective must be the betterment of mankind including the ministry. If God would have us provide for the stranger, surely He would have us provide adequately, even generously, for His ministers.

That does not mean that a minister of God needs to live like a movie star. It does not excuse misrepresentation or waste. Prosperity is a trial for the ministry, too. God did not intend that they be excluded from the trials of prosperity.

There is nothing inherently unrighteous or unspiritual about wealth. Many of God's servants in the Bible were wealthy. The Bible states that God blessed them with wealth! (See Genesis 13:2 and Job 42: 10-17.)

Let's review some scriptures about the ministry and its compensation. Then we can discuss potential applications of these principles for Christians.

For, whoever shall call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not .believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:13-15)

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we not have a right to eat and drink? Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

Or do Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these

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things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing."

God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

But I have used none of these things...What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. (I Corinthians 9:3-18)

And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived.. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." (Galatians 6:6)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (I Timothy 5:17-18)

Again, Offerings Not Tithes

These verses show that Paul is aware of tithes and offerings. He doesn't criticize or deny the Levites' right to tithes. He supports the priests' right to offerings, that is, to "share with the altar."

Then Paul presents a separate right for God's chosen ministers. It is a right apart from, different and not related to, the rights of the Levitical priesthood. It is a right to "get their living from the gospel." Ministers get their livelihood from the gospel and not from the altar because the Melchizedek altar of spirit is in heaven, served by Jesus.

To support the right to these wages, Paul uses the example of an ox working. Ministers of Jesus Christ earn wages as a soldier or a farm laborer. Their work qualifies them to receive freewill offerings like the Aaronite priests. The gospel will not be heard unless there are preachers or evangelists, so they have a right to be supported for their efforts.

It is to wages and offerings, not to tithes or inheritances that Paul refers. It is a direct reward according to the ministers' works. Reward according

to works is the basis of Christ's judgment of the saints apart from salvation, which is a free gift and totally undeserved.

The Levitical priesthood was supported proportional to the production of the land. The land's yield was partly dependant on the labor of the Israelites. Weather, rain in particular, was another important factor. If the local Levite was doing his job properly, there would have been better production due to a better educated population and God's blessing. Doing his job well yielded an indirect bonus for his efforts.

An increase in reward due to increase in production was not totally a reward according to works because the right to the tithe was the Levites' inheritance. The right itself was not earned, which is analogous to salvation, a gift of grace. God gave the land to Israel and its tithe to Levi based on His purpose. God's gift of the land was not founded on any human merit. Israel was His choice. He was not theirs.

Both Israelite and Levite had to work in faith in order to eat the production of their inheritance. Historically, when the Levite failed in his job, most Israelites also ceased to tithe as they ceased to obey God in general. The relationship between the Levites' performance and general Israelite behavior, or state of faith, is not causally related directly. Some Israelites tithed - or did not tithe - regardless of whether the local Levites were Godly or not

Paul often supported himself when visiting a church. Perhaps he didn't want the new converts to think he was after their money. Perhaps he didn't want to take the chance of competitive feelings with the other (especially locally-based) elders over finances.

In any event, Paul is plain that he did have the right to receive material support from the people he served. In fact, he did receive aid from some of the churches on a consistent basis. Like God, Paul's first concern was for those he served.

Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?

I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. (II Corinthians 11:7-9)

The Bible encourages giving to God's work. Paul had some problems because he did not always claim his right to wages. In any case, Paul would not have apologized about the whole matter if he believed that a law of tithing was in force for the church.

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How God Rewards

God rewards generosity if it is done with discernment, wisdom and a humble heart. The totality of the Jewish widow's gift to the temple was symbolic more of her attitude of total sacrifice to God than a literal example to follow.

God does not expect us to foolishly give away our own inheritances and become dependant on the church for our living.

We are to be dependant on Him in faith and financially responsible for our families and our own support. We are to work our inheritances just as the ancient Israelites worked the land of Canaan. We are to use our talents and opportunities to bear practical fruit. We are to let the Holy Spirit work in us to bear spiritual fruit.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, "He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever."

Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. (II Corinthians 9:6-14)

The whole purpose of mortal life is to learn. There will always be financial ups and downs. These circumstances provide lessons, opportunities to learn. The key is to learn how to bear spiritual fruit out of a physical life. The fruits of the spirit include faith, love, righteousness, and generosity to our neighbor and the ministry.

For I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled

and going hungry, both having abundance and suffering need.

I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. And you yourselves also know, Philipians, that at the first preaching of the gospel after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone, for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, and acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:10-19)

Pragmatic Application of Principles

The scriptures give us broad direction in the use of church funds. From its received donations, a church may pay its elders, support education of children and adults, pay for any cost incurred to further the gospel, and support the needy and disadvantaged. The key is that the source of the funds be voluntary, freewill offerings given with a cheerful heart.

God does not grant spiritual blessings in proportion to a Christian's zealous obedience in tithing on his material increase. Tithing is not a law binding on Christians today. We do not need to tithe to please God. But, the tithing laws do provide many useful guidelines.

For example, the Levitical tithing laws may provide some ideas for practical church administration. First of all, the members of a group may voluntarily agree to encourage donating ten per cent of their income as a means of supporting their work. It would be a decision of that group, or even a collectively imposed condition of membership in a particular church congregation. But it is not tithing, and it should not be presented as a biblical law.

A broad application might be found in the case of a large religious organization organized into local, regional, and/or national structures where ten per cent of the locally received contributions could be set aside for the national or the next larger division's support or projects.

Another idea is to use ten per cent as a measure of evaluating an organization's or a department's efficiency of operation. For example, does a national organization's efficiency of operation enable it to remain within a budget based on ten per cent of local donations? A budget ceiling, such as one determined by a ten per cent contribution from local income, tends to put a reasonable damper on wild

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expenditures or eliminate projects that do not possess wide support or usefulness to the contributor members.

Another application of the same principle of the Levites' payment of a tithe of their tithes to the sons of Aaron might be found in the calculation of ministerial and staff compensation. A church might look at ten per cent of its income being the portion budgeted for ministerial salaries. Other activities such as relief for the poor or education would come under separate consideration as the general work of the church. The humanitarian needs the tithe anciently fulfilled could be used to set priorities for other church expenditures.

In some cases, a religious organization's income may be too large or too small to justify a ten percent dedication to its evangelist(s) and/or minister(s). Larger organizations usually have proportionately larger fixed costs that make this application of tithing principles unreasonable. Small groups may need to allocate more than ten per cent to enable a full time minister to live decently.

On a personal basis, many find the principle of setting aside ten per cent of their income a useful rule of thumb to plan their giving. Obviously, it is up to the giver to determine what his or her increase is since it is strictly a freewill offering. Some may use net income, and some use their gross. It is a matter of individual choice, not one of some misplaced sense of obligation. The decision of how and when to give, if at all, is voluntary as it was with Abraham and Jacob. It is not a sin to "tithe" by giving a ten per cent offering of first fruits, for example.

The Bible is plain about one thing, however: God is not glorified by self-imposed poverty. He wants each family to stand on its own feet economically.

That does not necessarily mean in luxury, but it is His purpose that no one be permanently dependant on the church or society for their physical survival. God encourages us to save and to invest in our means of support and production. He gives us the power to make wealth that we may support His works of proclaiming the gospel and aid to the poor.

Festival Budgeting

The tithing laws also illustrate suitable ways to spend donations to God's glory. Anciently, the Israelites celebrated the festivals, supported the Levites, and aided the widow, the orphan and the stranger from one tithe. That was efficiency! It was not an onerous burden.

Some may desire and can afford to budget more than one 10% portion of their increase or tithe. He might choose to dedicate 10% for others' religious efforts and then set aside another 10% for their own

observance of the festivals and personal evangelistic efforts.

Personal Evaluation of How Much

If you feel this is what you want to do, I would encourage you to honestly evaluate the long term impact of any program of charitable giving. Yes, you should exercise faith, but also common sense. One test: will you be able to live up the Biblical description of a righteous man, someone who provides for his grandchildren as well as his children?

Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. (II Corinthians 12:14)

A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children. (Proverbs 13:22)

It is better to be able to give slightly more each year than to give a lot in anyone year to the serious detriment of reinvestment in your personal financial well being. That could perhaps be a refusal to recognize an opportunity God has given you to make additional wealth to provide for future needs in His church.

I think that the best section of scripture to guide one in regards to monetary priorities and attitudes is Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-24:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...

No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life...

Do not be anxious then, saying "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink? With what shall we clothe ourselves?"

For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The message here is that God has promised to provide for our physical life and all its needs if we dedicate that life to His service. Mammon is

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materialism, the God of self-preservation and physical survival. It is concerned with food and clothes and shelter. Jesus states that if we worry and put first worldly survival, we will be incapable of serving God for we will despise Him.

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

We must be willing to die to sin, this world, and (most difficultly) to ourselves in order to live unto God spiritually in an attitude of humility and repentance. The Bible warns us to be wise, however, so that we don't functionally commit suicide by becoming useless to Him.

Christians will suffer persecution for following Jesus and obeying God, but God's word advises us against suffering for our own foolishness and vanity. God is not impressed by human pain and suffering.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God; to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove that the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Romans 6:11-13)

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building ... But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man builds upon the foundation...each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward...

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:9-17)

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?

But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. (1 Peter 2:19-20)

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Chapter 14 - GOD WANTS YOU, NOT YOUR MONEY!

Material and spiritual blessings are not dependant on a legal obligation to tithe to any minister or church.

To please God, man is to be thankful in deed as well as in attitude. If we aren't thankful in deed, most likely we are fooling ourselves should we consider ourselves to be thankful in attitude.

Christianity is a one hundred per cent call to perfection. It is a total dedication to God. God is not fooled because He knows all. Fortunately, He is merciful and provides us aid through His Holy Spirit to obey Him. Even more wonderful is that fact that eternal life is a free gift, totally unmerited. We can only receive it by Godly faith, not by human works.

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; [would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth...Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, [will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as [also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (Revelation 3:15-21)

Principle of First Fruits

The foundational principle of offering is that of first fruits. It is the primary key to understanding how to approach giving as a disciple of Jesus.

Christians are the first fruits of God's harvest of all mankind because the Church is the very Body of Christ who is THE first fruit from the dead. Central to these concepts of first fruits is the very hope of the resurrection - God's gift of ETERNAL LIFE:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also Christ all shall be made alive.

But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (I Corinthians 15:20-24)

...concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:3-4)

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (Colossians 1:18)

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. (Ephesians 5:23, read verses 21-33)

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures. (James 1:16-18)

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them...who had not worshiped the beast or his image...and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6)

The First Resurrection of Saints

The First Resurrection from the dead is the first fruits of God's harvest to eternal life or the Saints. The term "the rest of the dead" refers to the rest of humanity who did not receive God's Holy Spirit in this life.

They will be resurrected later (the Second Resurrection) to a mortal life of judgment in the presence of Christ. So God "with whom there is no variation" - unlike a slot machine - will patiently accomplish His will of bringing all to repentance and eternal life with Him. (11 Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:4)

Death is the doubter's choice. Unless God is real to each of us, unless you and I believe Jesus' sacrifice covered our sins and that God is therefore personally involved with us, then any belief we might have is a dead faith. It will not lead to life eternal for us, and it will not yield the works of righteousness that form the basis of God's reward.

The converted Saints, spiritual Church of God, will be the first fruits by the First Resurrection from the dead - just as Jesus is today declared God's Son by his own resurrection.

His resurrection as a first fruit is the proof of the power of God's promise to us. It is our hope. Jesus, as Head of the Church, is one with and a part of the Church. In type we are already resurrected in Him because we are His Body by which He will rule the kingdoms of this earth. (See also Revelation 11:15.)

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Levites a Type of God's First Fruits

Thus, the Levites were a type of the redeemed church, the first fruits of God. In this type of the church, God figuratively took the first born of every tribe, just a group of people with no connection to each other - no single identifying name, and "created" one priestly tribe. Out of a diverse, unholy, and unqualified many, He made a single priestly family.

Today God is doing the same thing by taking His first fruits from a mish-mash of peoples from around the world and to ultimately create one holy Melchizedek Priesthood, all brothers together, under Jesus Christ as High Priest.

It is a "church of the first born" who are chosen in Christ today as the first born of the dead. They shall be made immortal priests after the Order of Melchizedek by the power of the First Resurrection at Jesus' Second Coming. As His servants, Christians are also graced with a more abundant life today. Remember, abundance is not measured solely by material things:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. (Hebrews 3:1)

But you (the church, the first fruits) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the King God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God; the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth. (Revelation 5:10)

These are important concepts from the standpoint of tithing because the entire church - both ministry and lay members - are equal in their calling as immortal priests of God in the resurrection. The entire membership of Jesus' Body, the Church, are equal in their qualifications as priests, for the basis of our qualification is the same - the sacrifice and indwelling life of Jesus. The Levites were a type of the whole church - not just the ministry!

All True Believers are First Fruits

As priests to be, we are all first fruits. We are all chosen of God. There is no other mediator or source

of redemption for us other than Jesus. There is no other man, no Levite or priest (not I for you, nor you for me) to stand as a mediator for us, as atonement for our sins toward God, but Jesus.

Simply put, it is illogical for anyone of us to owe tithes to another. We are all the same, chosen first fruits of God, and therefore, spiritually of equal station to each other. As first fruits, we are what is owed to God, not the money in our pockets.

Just as Jesus was born in the express image of the Father, so He also took on the Father's immortal likeness with His resurrection from the dead. As Jesus is the first of the first fruits, so God invites you to become one of those first fruits now. God's first fruits among men will be resurrected to eternal life at Jesus' return to become one with Him in the celebration of the wedding feast.

Let Jesus lead you in how to give to His work, where you find it, in the way He makes it possible for you to give. For we work with God and Christ towards perfection in love. In God's service, we work as one with Him through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In that same Spirit, we are one with His other servants, our brethren in the faith. As His servants, we aid each other in both the grace of spiritual gifts, in the works of time consuming labor, and in donating money.

This is how we yield ourselves to be one with God and our bodies as tools in His service. We are all ministers of God called to work together. This does not mean that we are all televangelists or pastors, but we are His servants or ministers. We administer His Word and Will in our lives through His Holy Spirit as lights to the world. We put out the loving effort to grow in grace and knowledge by extending the depth of our faith in forgiving ourselves and others ever more completely.

The Chosen Order of Melchizedek

God will be satisfied with nothing else, and He will reward us with nothing less than to be priests forever after the order of Melchizedek.

Those begotten of the Spirit are God's order of Melchizedek. Those begotten of the Spirit today are God's the first fruits of a future worldwide harvest. Today Jesus is the only first born from the dead and the High Priest in that same order.

God does not want your material things - your tithe, the material first fruits of your labor or dead works. God wants you - your life - as His first fruits of grace, the fruits of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

He wants you to begin to enjoy His blessings in a better life now. By His Spirit, we can glorify Him through acceptable works of righteousness, obedience, as well as by financial donations.

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God is not a slot machine that spits out uncertain material bribes and benefits to anyone, believer or minister, without thought or concern for the recipient. You cannot bribe God or play Him like the lottery hoping for some return on money given to those who claim to represent Him.

Personal sacrifices of any kind cannot move God to conform to any mortal's will. God only accepts the sacrifice of Jesus, His only begotten Son. If a man or woman conforms to God's will, then his or her mortality will put on immortality.

No, God is Not a Slot Machine. He is sure. The only variable, the only chance God has taken is that He left the choice up to you.

You must choose life in order to have it. That is the one thing God through Christ cannot do for you. He cannot give you the power to choose, but all power in the universe awaits to help in love those who do. It's guaranteed by His Oath and Promise.

So, choose life! Because everyone who so chooses shall abundantly live now and forever.